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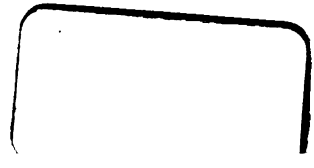

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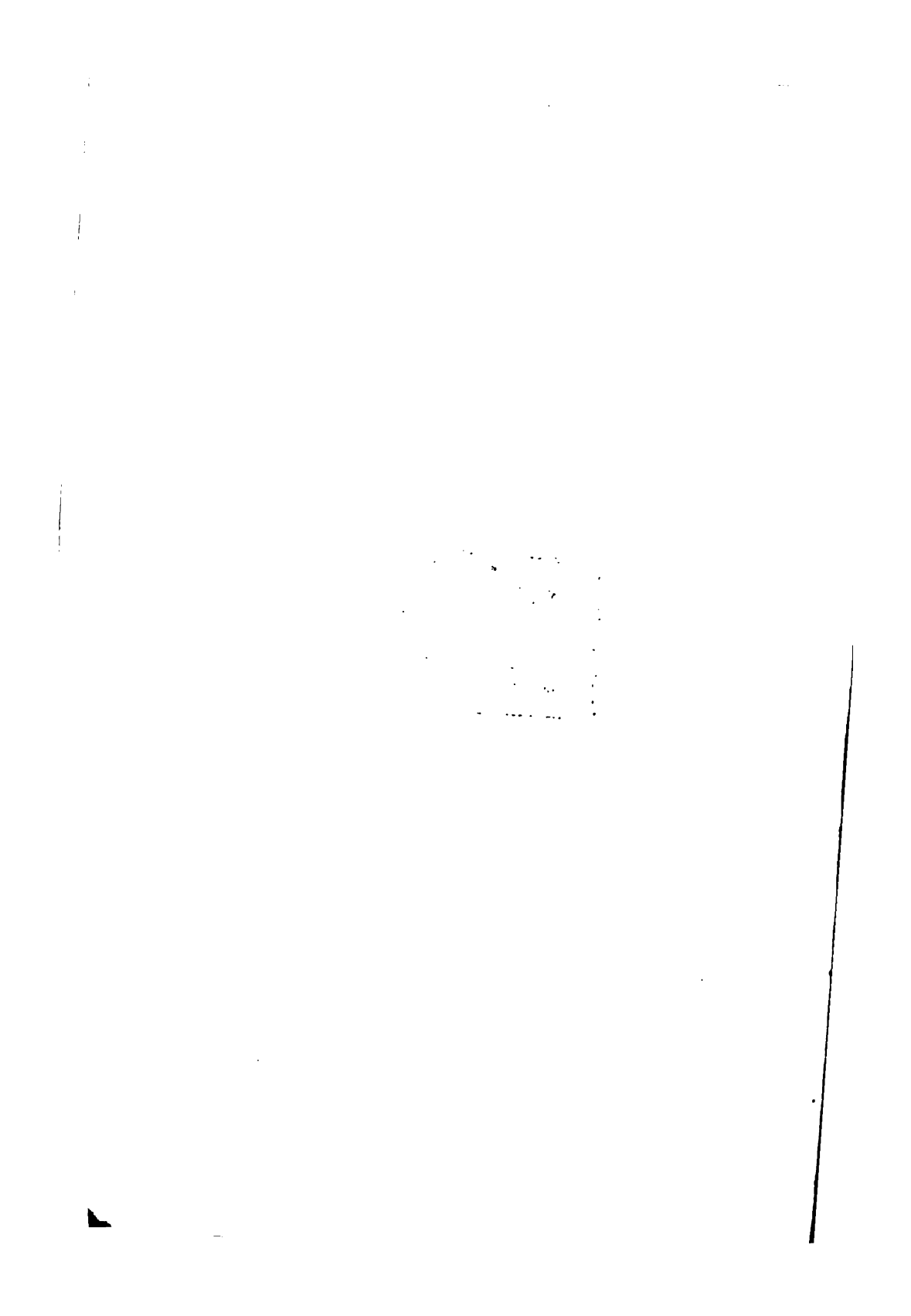

A Descriptive and Historical
an Alpine Valley
Story and in

By

With 39 Illustrations and

New York and London
The
1912

The Valley of Aosta

A Descriptive and Historical Sketch of an Alpine Valley Noteworthy in Story and in Monument

By

Felice Ferrero

With 39 Illustrations and Maps

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1910

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PREFACE

A FRENCH traveller once described the valley of Aosta enthusiastically as the most interesting spot in Europe. Even if we deem the superlative praise of the French traveller an exaggeration, it is no overstatement to characterise the valley as one of the most interesting places in Europe. A combination such as the valley presents, of the highest peaks of the Alps, of the best Roman ruins outside of Rome and Pompei, and of scores of remarkable mediæval castles, is nowhere else to be found, and is, in itself, sufficient reward for a trip to the region that holds it.

Such a trip must be made on purpose, for the valley is not on a main international line of transit; it is, however, a journey easy to make, since the valley is not far from important cities, like Milan and Turin.

The best season for an excursion is naturally the height of summer, because the weather is well settled and the summer hotels are open;

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but almost any season is suitable, and has advantages of its own. During the second half of July and the whole of August, the period of Italian school and business vacations, hotels are crowded, coaches and mules hard to get, the guides pre-empted, so that one sometimes pays with discomfort for the good weather. In both spring and fall, the valley has a very different aspect: the great hotels are closed, and the traveller must be content with modest hostelries; but as a compensation, he will have the region the more to himself, and find the valley and its population as they really are, in everyday clothes rather than dressed up for company.

The chief source of revenue for the inhabitants is the cattle and cheese industry; both cattle and men go through a sort of periodical internal migration that, from season to season, entirely changes the appearance of the valley. As soon as fair spring weather comes, the cows are hurried up to the high pastures, away to the edges of the glaciers and the permanent snows. Wherever there is a little patch of verdure, even though the elevation and the short summers do not allow of its growing more than an inch or two out of the ground, the cows graze happily on the most aromatic of forage; the butter and cheese industry

continues four, five, six thousand feet above the level of winter quarters.

As soon as the bad season approaches, the cattle are gradually withdrawn to lower pastures, and so retiring before on-coming snows and winter, they finally arrive at the home village and their own stables. By the end of September, the homeward migration is completed and the villages —half deserted during the summer by their population, which is partly gone to the heights with the cattle and partly to the cities in search of work—are again teeming with life and activity.

Thus those who renounce the not always certain comforts of summer will probably find more of human interest to satisfy them at other seasons, and, at the same time, have all the opportunities they want for walks and tramps,—the only person who is restricted to the few months of hot weather being the climber of great heights. The lover of nature will find a rare, keen delight in the fresh mountain air of the spring, when the snow is gone from the bottoms, but still whitens the high pastures; or in the tepid, mellow, and somewhat melancholy light of the autumn sun that wages its losing battle against the invincible sharpness of the frost.

The plan that has been followed in dealing with the subject before us, was to separate it into three parts, according to a natural division suggested by time: the first part deals with the valley as it is now; the second, with the valley of the Roman era; and the third, with the valley as it was in the Middle Ages.

Both in our descriptions of persons and places, and in the narration of adventures and events, we have always endeavoured to avoid too pedantic and ponderous a presentation of the subject. For the sake of completeness, however, we were obliged more than merely to touch on some historical and archæological details, without which men and things would have appeared obscure. We hope that the reader takes willingly the technical part, remembering that life is not—or should not be—all play,—nor is travel.

The reader who discovers enough interest in the region to make his desire to investigate further some special subject, will find included in this work an abundant bibliography, which will take him as far and as deep as he cares to go. While some of the reference books are very difficult to get at, being of so local a nature, most of them are to be found in almost every large and well equipped library.

For the heights of mountain peaks and places of note, and, in most cases, for the nomenclature and spelling of names of mountains and places, we have followed the topographical maps of the Italian Military Geographical Institute, scale 1: 100,000, edition of 1906–1907. An English foot, for the purpose of our calculations, is considered equal to m. 0.3048. Differences in spelling which occur between text, index, and maps, are due to the varying orthography of the region caused by the simultaneous use of forms from the several different languages and dialects.

When not otherwise stated, the illustrations that accompany the text are taken from photographs by the author. Photographs of different points and objects in the valley are as yet scanty in number and not easy to find for sale: contributions from amateurs have therefore been necessary. I wish here to express my thanks to Signor Origoni of Milan and to Signor Giovanni Botta of Turin, for the pictures kindly contributed by them.

For the preparation of the manuscript for the press, and for important help in illustrating the work, I am deeply indebted to Frances Ferrero, my wife.

FELICE FERRERO.

New York City,
January 15, 1910.

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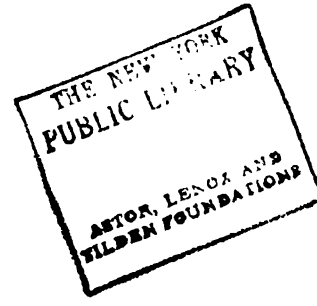
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CHAPTER I

THE LAND

THE valley of Aosta lies at the extreme northwestern corner of Italy, nestling in the angle where the main chain of the Alps, with a sharp turn at the Mont Blanc, changes its general direction from north and south to east and west: it is bounded, therefore, on two sides by the central body of the great mountain system of Middle Europe, in the very part where this reaches its loftiest elevation. More than a valley, it is a vast, if not complex, mass of heights and hollows, by far the most extensive in surface of all the valleys of the Western Alps.

The main Alpine chain is of uneven development on the two sides of the divide, which is also, in general, the line of political frontier. This is particularly true of the western section of the Alps, lying partly in France and partly in Italy. While on the French side the ranges zigzag widely toward the far-away plains of the Rhone, covering

the whole of Savoy and Dauphiné, on the Italian side they descend so abruptly into the levels below, that in some places scarcely a distance of twenty miles intervenes between the highest point in the valley—as, for instance, the Mont Viso with its thirteen thousand feet of elevation—and the last undulations of the foothills, dying into the great plains of the Po hardly a thousand feet above the sea-level.

This odd natural arrangement would have suffered no exception farther north, where the valley of Aosta lies, had not the main Alpine chain, after reaching the imposing height of the Mont Blanc, swung as on a pivot and run for a long distance at a right angle with the direction previously followed from the Tyrrhenian Sea. This brought the valleys running into Italy from the first section of the chain to face those running from the second section, and the waters flowing down both sets of valleys to unite at the bottom and struggle between and around the protruding extremities of the ridges, to find a way out toward the river Po—a miniature Mississippi; like its bigger brother called the "Father of the Waters," each a stately but most capricious father! Thus many minor valleys, few of which would be considered sizable enough to claim individual distinc-

tion, united to make one of the largest and best defined mountain regions in the Alps.

The valley of Aosta could, like the United States, use as its motto, "E pluribus unum," and show what wonderful things united forces can do in nature as well as in the world of men. The "Unity"—if one may so define it—of the valley is a striking feature: bounded on two sides, the north and the west, of its irregular quadrangle by the extended series of ice-clad peaks of the Pennine Alps; on the south, by the powerful range of the Gran Paradiso, also heavy with ice; and on the east by a long, jagged, steep range, whose lowest point toward the plains, Colma di Mombarone, is almost eight thousand feet high; its mountains terminate abruptly in the Po bottoms, dominating them from storied arêtes and summits, approached by only a narrow avenue of access, through which the torrent boils, turbulent with the waters of a hundred glaciers. At one end of the avenue is the "valley," beautiful and terrible, but always wonderful; at the other end is the commonplace world.

Such splendid isolation had, as we shall later see, its effect upon the inhabitants, who developed an intense life of their own in that little corner riven from the world.

The whole northern side of the valley of Aosta is paralleled on the Swiss side of the Alps by the broad valley of the Rhone, upon which the main range abuts with many long ridges and ravines, some, like the Zermatt valley, of world-wide repute. Toward the west, at the sharp line of divide and frontier, the valley of Aosta meets France and two Savoyan valleys, one of which is also of great renown: the valley of Chamonix, along the Mont Blanc, and, farther to the south, the valley of the Isère, known in history under the name of Tarantaise.

Taking Ivrea, a small town twenty miles north of the railroad line between Milan and Turin, as the starting-point—although it properly lies outside, at a short distance from the defile through which one enters the valley itself—and Courmayeur, at the foot of the Mont Blanc, as the point of arrival—although the valley geographically extends farther into the gorges below the Mont Blanc, the length of the main valley of Aosta is a trifle over sixty miles. The length of all the valleys, main and secondary, put together, as far as it is possible to go by stage roads or mule paths, amounts, probably, to more than two hundred and fifty miles. It is practically impossible to make an exact estimate of the length

of mountain paths, since distances in the mountains are always gauged by the "hour," or the "height," and not by the mile, steepness and the state of the path being factors more practical and important. The total surface of the valley is nearly two thousand square miles. While such data may give a superficial notion of the vastness of its territory, they cannot necessarily convey any definite idea of the space actually of use within its limits.

As has already been said, the valley of Aosta is composed of a main valley and many secondary or lateral valleys. The main valley, originating under the chain of the Mont Blanc, runs for about two thirds of its length—as far as the gorge of Montjovet—in a nearly easterly direction; that is, parallel to the northern divide: it then turns toward the south-east, and this direction it maintains until it makes its exit into the morenic amphitheatre of Ivrea. The torrent that flows through it, one of the most abundant affluents of the Po, is called the Dora Baltea, and has its source in several glaciers of the Mont Blanc. Along its mountainous course it receives the contributions of numerous other streams, mostly glacial, carrying, like the Dora, the peculiarly greyish-white, almost milk-coloured, waters that

the glaciers supply by the melting of ice and the grinding of rocks to impalpable powder. The Dora keeps its whitish colour, especially in summer, when the glacial discharge is greatest, far out into the plains, almost to its confluence with the Po.

All mountain torrents always carry along a large mass of detritus, and pieces of débris often of notable size. When the torrents that descend from the side valleys encounter the sudden and powerful obstacle of the swift and turgid current of the Dora, they are forced to a sort of unexpected halt, slowing up before the waters mingle and they lose themselves in the major torrent. This slowing up of the current has caused great heaps of deposit to form, and where the minor torrent has had sufficient power to shove its pile of débris farther and farther on toward the other side of the valley, the course of the Dora has made broad detours and has, so to speak, been forced to the wall, to beat with its furious whirl the rocky base of the ridges. So there has been formed at the bottom of every side valley a flat plateau, sometimes small, sometimes ample, sometimes low and sometimes lofty, which has proved providential for the valley: in fact, upon these accretions develops most of the human life of the region; villages rise and farms prosper. The

valley is a succession of these plateaus, smiling spots of open space, which alternate with narrow, wild, forbidding gorges, where the ridges jutting from opposite sides come so near as almost to touch one another.

Starting from Ivrea, one passes first through the defile already mentioned as the opening of the valley, and comes to the plateau of Pont St. Martin and the village of Donnaz. Incidentally, it might here be said that Donnaz, built against the north side of the valley, sheltered from cold winds in all directions, with a sunny southern exposure, enjoys a much milder climate than any other place in Piedmont, a region of raw and uncompromising winters. Then one comes upon the gorge of Bard, above which broadens out the plateau of Verrès; next, another awesome rocky ravine, the Montjovet Narrows, and the plateau of St. Vincent, heaped high above the bottom of the valley by the torrent Marmore, which has later deeply furrowed into the loose material of its own gathering and again reached the original bottom through a narrow and most impressive gulch.

After a new gorge at Châtillon, a plateau at Fénis, and a gorge at Villefranche, comes the most extensive of all the plateaus, that on which Aosta, the chief town of the Val d'Aosta, lies.

Here is the only place in the valley that might, with proper regard for exactness, be called an open plain—being several miles long, although at no point so wide.

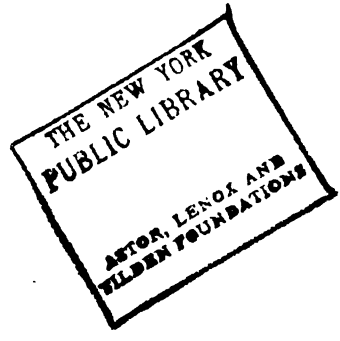
But the succession of gorges and plateaus does not end at Aosta: Arvier and Ruinaz lie in small open spaces; the Pierre Taillée seems to obstruct the valley beyond it entirely; Morgex has fields around it, so has Pré St. Didier. The last plateau of any size is that of Courmayeur at the foot of the Mont Blanc.

This formation of alternating ravines and plateaus is repeated in a similar manner in the lateral valleys. In general, one may say that wherever there is a village of some importance there is also to be found an open level of land, where the waters of the torrent slacken awhile before the next leap, where the mountaineers may raise some crops, and the traveller on foot find comforting diversion from the steady, fatiguing climb.

The secondary valleys are numerous, both on the north and on the south side of the main valley; the most important, however, from either an economic or an artistic standpoint, are those on the north. Coming from Ivrea, one first meets the valley of Gressoney, on the right hand, at

The Gorge of the Marmore (*Châtillon*)

From a photograph by Frances Ferrero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Pont St. Martin. It has also been called Vallesa, or Val du Lys, from the name of its torrent. It is the longest of all the Aosta valleys, with the exception of the main valley, and is one of the most picturesque. Gressoney, a village at its upper end, divided into two hamlets, is a well-known summer resort, a favourite retreat of Queen Dowager Margherita. At its upper extremity, towering above the pleasant green pastures of Gressoney-la-Trinité, rise the brilliant glaciers of the Lyskamm (14,875 ft.), one of the peaks of the Monte Rosa *massif*, the main peaks of which stand more to the east, topping the valleys of the Sesia and of Macugnaga.

Curiously enough, this magnificent valley, one of the "brightest jewels of the crown" of Aosta, has always been treated as a sort of Cinderella by the rest of the Aostan world. It never was a part of the homogeneous political system of the great valley, which for centuries formed the Duchy of Aosta. The confines of the Duchy ended at the bridge over the Lys at Pont St. Martin, and the valley of Gressoney was made to share the varying fortunes of the lords of Carema and the plains below. Even yet, the old diffidence of the stalwart mountaineers of Val d' Aosta toward their fellow-beings of Vallesa is not over-

come: though so evidently a part of the geographical system of the valley, though so well-known and prosperous, though boasting the second Alpine peak of fame, Gressoney is connected with the Biella section of the Alpine Club and not with that of Aosta! Why this should be, is difficult to explain, unless one wants to believe it due to the Valdostans' exaggerated spirit of loyalty to their section, and the fact that the Vallesa is in part inhabited by a population of foreign stock.[1]

Next to Gressoney, toward the west, is the valley of Challant-Ayas, rather broader, and at points very pleasant. To its river the inhabitants have given the name Èvançon, which in their patois means *soapy water*. The valley, opening below at Verrès, winds between the ridges in the shape of an elongated *S*, and ends above at St. Jacques, commanded by the flattened dome of the Breithorn, by the rounded cones of the Twins—all part of the Monte Rosa *massif*—and by their abundant glaciers. On the left of the Breithorn, there is also to be seen the dwarf peak of the Little Matterhorn, a miniature model of its great neighbour and godfather, rising in the broad *firn* or upper *nevé*[2] of the region of the Théodule. The

[1] See page 33.
[2] See page 98.

main village in this valley of Challant-Ayas, is Brusson, a summer resort of rising fame.

Val Tournanche—still following in order westward—begins at Châtillon and ends at Breuil, under the gigantic bluffs of the Matterhorn. By the side of its stupendous mass, the sharp head and the small, ugly hanging glaciers[1] of the neighbouring Dent d'Hérens (13,988 ft.) do not show to their best. Very little ice is to be seen from the high vantage of Breuil, since the mountain flanks are almost everywhere too sheer for passing snow to cling, or more than small hanging glaciers to form; but, on the other hand, the rocky formation is of the most impressive: tremendous, unscalable walls, pinnacles—mountains in themselves—jagged *arêtes* of extraordinary shape and size. One of the best hotels in the whole Val d'Aosta is situated above Breuil, at the so-called Giomein, nearly seven thousand feet above sea-level, a place offering many comforts and possessed of a worthy history.[2] Valtournanche, the town of this lateral valley, a favourite summer resort, lies some distance below Breuil.

The valley of St. Barthélemy, through which flows the torrent of the same name, is a wild,

[1] See page 98.
[2] See page 70.

short gash in the mountains, with a bad path, a few poor hamlets, and a few peaks of second order, better seen and climbed from the neighbouring valleys of Tournanche and Pelline, between which it lies as if crushed by mighty weights.

Val Pelline is, in itself, a little mountain system. Opening directly above Aosta, after a few miles, it branches out into three different vales, radiating from a centre, which corresponds approximately to the site of Gignod, the chief town. The branch on the right runs back toward the Dent d' Hérens, which on this side presents a long ice slope and a more accessible face than on the Val Tournanche side. Over the middle branch, Val d'Ollomont, towers another of the *colossi* of the Alps—although its uppermost peak stands entirely on Swiss territory, and only a long arête connects it with the divide—the Grand Combin. Rising immediately from this valley the Mont Velan (12,168 ft.) shows a front hopelessly beyond attempt at ascension: this must be made by the glacier at the side and the arête. The branch on the left hand leads finally to less imposing mountain scenery, but to a point of more human interest, the Pass and the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard.

The main valley of Aosta above Courmayeur

branches out into two long furrows in opposite directions, thanks to which the whole Italian side of the Mont Blanc is set free, as it is on the French side by the upper valley of the Arve at Chamonix. The branch lying in a south-westerly direction, called the Allée Blanche because of the glaciers that jut down into it to very low levels, is considered the upper part of the valley of the Dora proper; the other, extending to the north-east, is the Val Ferret.

Among the valleys to the south, the one worthiest of note is that of the Petit St. Bernard, in which lies La Thuile, a most attractive village. The mountains that surround and end the valley, on both sides of the famous pass, and in the Ruitor branch to the east, are not of the first rank, but present a noble array of points and glaciers that culminates in the east at the Ruitor (11,437 ft.), in the west at the Pointe de Léchaud (10,260 ft.). Another peak of interest on the *contrefort* between this valley and the Allée Blanche, is the Mont Berio Blanc (10,692 ft.), with a fine, sharp head.

While the valley of the Petit St. Bernard is made easy by the existence of a commodious stage road, the valleys following it to the east are almost imperviable and very little frequented, mule paths being the best they can offer.

Val Grisanche, ending at the majestic Grande Sassière (12,332 ft.), a difficult and long ascent; the Val de Rhêmes, with vast fields of ice at its extremity, around which the peaks of Becca dell' Ivergnan (11,834), Granta Parei (11,400), Bousson (10,974), Basei (10,951), Tout Blanc (10,306), Roletta (11,102), and Bioula (11,204) form a range of giant teeth; the Val Savaranche with the rocks of the Grivola (13,021 ft.) and the glaciers of the Gran Paradiso (13,323 ft.),—all these valleys are simply long and narrow furrows. Although they are almost without hotels, they do not lack beauties, and are good examples of primitive mountain regions.

Both the fine pyramid of the Grivola, and the Gran Paradiso, the highest point of the southern ridge of the Val d' Aosta, show to greater advantage on the side of the Val di Cogne, the best known, if not exactly well-cared for, of the southern valleys. Cogne, the village of the valley, lies in a broad, open plateau, rich in woods and pastures. Coming up from the lower valley, the traveller sees the Grivola rising to the right of the village; in front stand the Gran Paradiso and the somewhat lower Grand St. Pierre (12,112 ft.), while far out to the left, the Tersiva (11,509), and behind him, the Mont Emilius (11,667) and the

distant mass of the Mont Blanc complete a circle of peaks, which, although inferior in grandeur, suggests, in arrangement, the panorama above Zermatt.

The valley of Cogne communicates over the pass of Fenêtre with the valley of Champorcher, the last of the large southern valleys, which diverges directly toward the east. In the extensive slopes that rise between the widely separated openings of the valleys of Cogne and Champorcher, are to be found radiating, fan-like, from the Tersiva and the Mont Emilius, a few glens of small importance, like Val de Fénis and Val de Champ-de-Praz.

At present there are only three gateways through which access to Val d'Aosta is easy and comfortable. One is the opening toward the broad plains of Northern Italy and the valley of the Po, just above the town of Ivrea. Through this opening passes the only railroad line, which runs fifty miles up the main valley to Aosta, connecting that centre with Turin, Genoa, and Milan. The railroad communications are hardly beyond reproach: through trains run from Turin alone, and may be properly said to *run* only in summer, when two expresses cater to the "Sommer-

frischler." During the remaining three seasons, trains crawl up and down the valley at the safe pace of fifteen to twenty miles an hour, stopping every few minutes to catch breath or to pick up a stray peasant. The natives are steady pedestrians and do not generously patronise the railroad; for those who do, panting, worn-out engines, groaning, rickety cars, and a bumping road are apparently deemed quite sufficient. Bad as it is, however, it is at any rate a railroad, the only one in the whole region, and the only link with the rest of Italy: it deserves, therefore, respect and early consideration.

Through the other two gateways, the valley opens out toward foreign lands. Both approaches are high mountain passes, traversed by broad stage roads; both bear the name of St. Bernard; both have hospices on their summits; both are famous in history, for great armies under the lead of celebrated generals have crossed them into the promised land of Italy. Over both, the traveller can ride by mail stage or private coach; and both lead out from Aosta, the terminus of the railroad from the plains; so that touring through the main valley of Aosta from one end to the other at a reasonable rate of speed is possible.

The road that crosses the Grand St. Bernard, one

of the highest passes in the Alps, ends at Martigny in Switzerland; that which goes over the Petit St. Bernard descends into Savoy in France, following an almost opposite direction. One makes its way to the north, the other to the south of the great *massif* of the Mont Blanc: the latter joins the net of Savoyan roads that lead to Chambéry and Aix-les-Bains; the former touches at Martigny the railroad of the Rhone valley.

The Aosta railroad connects, at Pont St. Martin, with the stage road to Gressoney; at Verrès, with the stage road to Brusson and St. Jacques; at Châtillon, with the stage road to Valtournanche. The road to the Great St. Bernard connects at Gignod with a short run of stage road to Valpelline, and the road to the Little St. Bernard branches out at Pré St. Didier the short distance to Courmayeur. Since these are the only channels through which travel, in the modern sense of the word, is possible, and since there are no cable-roads anywhere, it must be admitted that Val d'Aosta is at present not easy to reach, and still less easy to explore: but in many people's minds this difficulty will probably enhance rather than diminish its charm.

There has long been talk of tunnelling the Mont Blanc between Courmayeur and Chamonix, to

open a new direct railroad communication between Italy and Geneva and France. The plan is as yet no more than a project, however, although since the opening of the Simplon there has been a revival of interest in it, and the French government has even named a commission to study the route and make the necessary surveys. If the tunnel were bored and the new road built, the valley of Aosta would be brought directly into the great international railroad system of Europe, served by express trains running out of Paris and Milan, and the Val d'Aosta would be as comfortable a stopping-place as the Tyrol or Valais.

Where there are no stage roads, one must be content with mule paths or trails. Some passes there are that are threaded by good mule paths, yet add little to the network of communications of the valley. Such are the Col de la Seigne (8234 ft.), at the end of the Allée Blanche, which leads at length to the road of the Petit St. Bernard on both sides of the frontier, and the Col. Ferret (8339 ft.), at the end of Val Ferret, which is only a variation, with poorer accommodations, of the road of the Grand St. Bernard.

Minor passes, only practicable on foot, are plentiful in every valley: they lead out of it into

neighbouring valleys, alongside over the ridges, or at the end over the divide. Some, though safe, require toilsome marches over stony paths; some lead over snow- and ice-fields; some can be surmounted only by the cautious scaling of precipitous rocks; and some must be conquered through perilous struggles and exposure to all the dangers of high climbing. Proportionately with the difficulty of the passage, diminishes the number of people that use it and, with that number, its importance as a pass. Many passes, in fact, bear only by courtesy the name *Col*, because, although they are depressions between two peaks, they are hardly more available as passes than the peaks themselves.

Among the high passes leading out of the valley of Aosta, the most noted and frequented is probably the Col du Théodule (10,905 ft.), between Zermatt and Breuil in Val Tournanche. Next to it deserves to be mentioned the Col du Géant (10,980 ft.), between Courmayeur and Chamonix. The Col Dolent, in the chain of the Mont Blanc, is probably the best instance of an impassable pass[1]: ascended by Whymper in 1864, it was again dared by another Alpinist in 1878; but we doubt if there is another record of crossing this

[1] Whymper, pages 334–335.

redoubtable highway, in which Whymper fancied he was discovering the shortest cut between Courmayeur and Chamonix.

Compared with other mountainous districts possessed of nothing but the squalor of terrible beauty, the Val d'Aosta might be considered as abounding in natural resources, but it is a poor country nevertheless. Where the torrents from the side valleys, pouring into the Dora, have created small deltas of workable land, the soil is carefully tilled, and little crops of rye and corn, fruit and vegetables are reaped once a year. In some parts of the valley, the vine grows with good will, if not with great prosperity, and very late in the fall yields grapes from which a sourish, light wine is made, not without glory in that neighbourhood: special mention is generally made of the wine of Chambave, and of that of Val d'Inferno,—a most remarkable place, this last, above Aosta, enclosing the village of Arvier, where the vines, held to the steep mountain side with tremendous labour by endless terracing, are still growing at the height of over four thousand feet above sea-level.

The chief productions of the valley, however, are cattle, cheese, and chestnuts. With the ex-

ception of part of the deltas just mentioned, most of the land of the valley-bottom is kept for pasturage, and all the sides of the mountains where grass can grow; that is, wherever the spruce and pine or beech forests are cut, and the rocks are not too steep for the dirt to stop on them, or the glaciers so near as to bury everything within the reach of their ruinous moraines. Cattle have always been the most precious possession of the valley: in 1825, there were no fewer than 30,000 head,[1] one for every two inhabitants! Once the Valdostans even did a thriving trade in exporting cattle to France: that was destroyed by the break in commercial relations between France and Italy in 1890, and has not been revived to any extent since the resumption of commercial intercourse in 1899. The pastures of the valley, stocked with the richest grass and the sweetest flowers of the Alps, cause the cows to yield most delicious milk, from which is made a most delicate cheese, indigenous to Val d'Aosta, known by the name of *fontina*. Fontina deserves as great a fame and as wide a success as Parmesan cheese, the making of which was once suggested to the Valdostans,[2] but, unfortunately, it, like their wines, does not

[1] Loche (Savoy).
[2] Loche (Savoy).

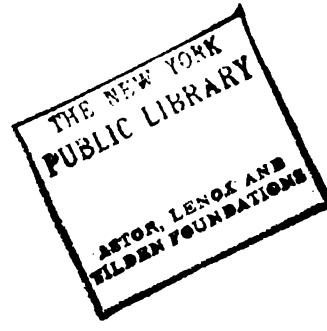
bear transportation to great distances. Honey also is a good product of the valley.

The valley of Aosta has also here and there some mineral resources, which were well known in ancient times, and probably more then than now exploited. Remarkable above all are the coal deposits of La Thuile, on the way to the Petit St. Bernard; remarkable, not so much for their wealth (since like the cheese and the wine they are used only for local consumption) as for the fact that they are the only deposits of actual "stone coal" as yet discovered in Italy,[1] lignites being all that is known elsewhere.

The most important mines now in operation are the copper mines of Ollomont, with an up-to-date plant, including an electric refinery. Iron ore is very common, and in spots, as, for instance, near Cogne, very rich in metal (average 54%, maximum 70%). Once the iron mines and mineral products of the valley were widely famous, but in this respect times have changed for the worse. Manganese is found at St. Marcel. Gold was discovered in small quantities in the quartzes of the high regions, and is actually mined near the Monte Rosa. In Roman times, it was washed from the sands of the Dora and

[1] Baretti, Fino e Porro.

In the Village of St. Vincent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tributary torrents; it is said that even now some peasants eke out a scanty living by such endeavour. Once, when the mineral fields of new worlds were as yet practically unknown, the deposits of the valley were so eagerly sought after, that in 1842 there was a lead mine worked above the Glacier du Miage, in the Allée Blanche [1]: the ore had to be carried over the glacier on men's backs.

The valley can also boast of some noteworthy mineral springs of long-standing fame. St. Vincent, which has in the past few years experienced a great boom and developed into a Carlsbad of thumb-nail dimensions, has a generous supply of water of Carlsbader effectiveness. As a matter of fact, the St. Vincent waters have a higher percentage of sulphate of sodium, and contain, besides, a noticeable amount of bicarbonate of sodium, like the Vichy waters.[2] The sources, discovered in 1770 by the priest Perret, belong to the town; their capacity during the season, with the help of a reservoir, is about one hundred and seventy-five gallons a day.

Near Pré St. Didier, in a dark and sinister gulch, the walls of which rise to five hundred feet, sheer, gushes forth from a little grotto an abund-

[1] Forbes, page 22.
[2] Oddi.

ant spring of hot water (95° Fahr.), containing, besides carbonate and chloride of calcium, and sulphate of soda, silica, traces of magnesia, manganese, bromides, and iodides, a considerable amount of iron and arsenic (iron arsenite—about 0.0025%).[1] The water is carried in cement pipes to the baths and used for the cure of gout, rheumatism, surface sores, and skin diseases.

Courmayeur has at its disposal four different springs, of three different types: the Vittoria spring gives a carbonated water with soda and lime; the Regina and Giovanna Battista springs pour forth ferrous water; and the spring of La Saxe is sulphurous.[2] While the water from the first three is used mainly to drink, the last serves chiefly for baths. The Vittoria, Giovanna Battista, and Saxe sources were already known in the eighteenth century; as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth,[3] they had made a summer resort of Courmayeur, and at the end of the eighteenth a bathing resort for the sick, who went there in great numbers.[4] It is very interesting to notice the great Mont Blanc's hold upon men: long before people of the cities and the plains cared for the

[1] Santanera.
[2] Santanera.
[3] Loche (Savoy).
[4] Saussure, chap. xxxii., § 876.

beauties of the mountains, *per se*, on both sides of the stormy giant, at Courmayeur and Chamonix,[1] they were nevertheless drawn for the summer to its feet.

[1] Saussure, chap. v., § 482.

CHAPTER II

THE PEOPLE

THE valley of Aosta has always been, as far as historical records can ascertain, a well populated district. Although its legends speak of a fabled people settled within its borders, prosperous and powerful, many centuries before the Christian era, the first mention in history of the region gives it as inhabited by the Salassi, a Celtic tribe, who soon after the time of Hannibal appear to have got into trouble with their dreaded and invading neighbours, the Romans.[1] The Salassi already occupied the main and side valleys, cultivating fields,[2] and mining various metals, especially gold.[3] The pressure from the Roman invasion increasing, the Salassi were pushed to the extreme limits of habitableness: the valley was therefore as well settled two thousand years ago as it is

[1] See page 123.

[2] Pliny (*Hist. Nat.*, xviii., 49) speaks of their raising millet and panic.

[3] Strabo, lib. iv., chap. 6, § 7 (vol. i., p. 322).

now. The population must also have been quite numerous, if, after the final Roman conquest, thirty-six thousand Salassi were sold as slaves, eight thousand forced into enlistment in the Roman army,[1] and still others were left in their old haunts as colonists.[2] To these were added numerous Roman settlers.[3]

Although the population of the valley noticeably diminished during the Middle Ages, as it did everywhere else in Europe, it grew large again in modern times. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it numbered 65,645; but then it had not yet recouped from the frightful slaughter of the plague in the seventeenth century, which had decimated it. At present it counts a few more than 80,000 persons.

The Valdostans are in some ways a very remarkable people. Like all mountaineers, they are deeply attached to their land; they are extremely sensitive, faithful to institutions and religion, physically strong, and thrifty. Although their condition may have, in late years, somewhat improved, because of the influx of tourists and the growing popularity of mountain sports, their lot

[1] Strabo, *loc. cit.;* Dion Cassius, liii., 25 (vol. iii., p. 163); Livy, Epitome of Book 135.

[2] See for more details, part ii., chap. i., p. 128.

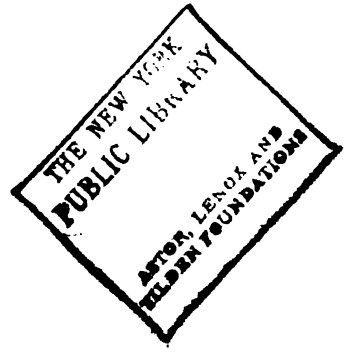
[3] Strabo, *loc. cit.*

is still a hard one and their resources are meagre. This forces them to a painful industriousness, as is revealed by the way they raise vineyards on the rocks, and the care with which they till and use every inch of earth that is reachable. Many families own small patches in different places, in different valleys and at different altitudes; but this multiple ownership does not make them rich—it is even a question sometimes whether the revenue from their fields is much more than sufficient to pay the taxes that weigh upon them.

From this situation there follows the necessity of expedients to weather the hardships of existence. The men often emigrate—though only temporarily—and try their luck abroad, especially in France; girls also go out of the valley into the Italian cities to household service. Some men, particularly strong and daring, get a prosperous livelihood from the risky pursuits of the guide or the smuggler or the poacher. The confines are never sharply defined between the lawful calling and the unlawful: when a man is poor, yet able-bodied, he sees no reason why he should not purchase his sugar or his salt or his tobacco a few hours away over the mountains, where, without the heavy Italian tax, it is much cheaper; and if he finds that others are willing to buy what he brings in on his shoulder,

Village and Manor-house of Issogne (1470 A.D.)

From a photograph by Frances Ferrero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he sees no reason why the intangible existence of an invisible frontier-line should interfere with his doing so. One may reckon that most of the inhabitants of the high parts of the valleys are always more or less addicted to smuggling; the fact is so well known that there is even a sort of mute tolerance of the practice on the part of the law, as long as it is not too openly and defiantly carried out.

As for poaching, there is the chamois in the valley, which, if not plentiful, is common enough in many spots. It yields good meat and a valuable skin; it lives in the wild upper regions, among rocks and glaciers, where watch is next to impossible. It is to be had for a shot. Though the hunt be somewhat tiresome, why not kill it? The shooting season is limited to about two months a year, but the mountaineer easily extends the time into eight or ten months by the decree of his own activities. There is also the ibex, rarer, and limited to a certain centre. Its hunt is more difficult, to be sure, and disposing of the game is more dangerous, since the animal is absolutely protected and infringement of the law means imprisonment; but greater risks bring greater returns, and those stocky mountaineers fear no risk.

We said that the men from the Val d'Aosta emigrate preferably to France. The reason for this is that French is the language prevalent throughout most of the region. The valley has for centuries—as late, in fact, as 1859—been strictly connected politically with Savoy and its rulers. With it and with these, the valley joined Italy, but without changing its language, which had been that of the larger part of Savoy for centuries. When Savoy was ceded to Napoleon III. by Italy in 1859, the valley of Aosta remained, as it were, without backing in the use of a language foreign to its new political setting, but still held on to it with the obstinacy characteristic of the sons of the mountains. Italian has slowly been making inroads, but all the main valley, from Châtillon to its upper end, and most of the side valleys, still use French as their official means of communication; and while the documents of the state authorities in Aosta are made up in Italian, the documents of the city authorities are written in French.

The only exception to this widespread use of French is to be found in the upper portion of the valley of Gressoney, where a German dialect prevails. This peculiar fact does not visibly affect the habits of the people, who, like all the rest

of the Valdostans, raise cattle, guide tourists, do occasional smuggling, and emigrate—only, the Gressoney dialect turns the step of the emigrant toward Germany, instead of to France.

There has been a great deal of discussion among historians as to how this handful of Germans came to be in the valley of Gressoney. Their dialect and customs make it beyond doubt clear that they belong to the same group of Germanic population as the inhabitants of Valais: but between them and the Valaisans rise in towering masses the steep rocks and the endless glaciers of the Monte Rosa, which cuts them off, instead of uniting them with their kinsmen. How did they reach these secluded retreats? It is a strange phenomenon that the settlement of Gressoney is not the only one in that neighbourhood of these stray Germans, for whom the other Germans have coined the pretty name of *Silvier*. The Silvier occupy all the Italian slopes of the Monte Rosa, which, in a rough way, corresponds to the range called by the Romans *Mons Silvius*[1]: they are to be found at the extremity of all the valleys coming down from the abrupt flanks of that range,—Alagna in Val Sesia, Rima in Val

[1] The Romans included the Matterhorn in the range.

Sermenta, Rimello in Val Mastalone, Macugnaga in Val Anzasca. Some authors have been led to suppose that once the Monte Rosa was not covered by glaciers, and that the Silvier could freely communicate with the Valaisans,[1] but this hypothesis is to be excluded. More plausible seems the version that the Bishop of Sion, in Valais, having conquered the valley of Gressoney in the thirteenth century, thought to fortify his hold upon it by populating it with his own people; but this version has also the defect of being unprecise and not explaining how the Silvier should also live in the neighbouring valleys, while the Bishop of Sion ruled only in Gressoney. In conclusion, the location of these Silvier must remain of mysterious origin.[2]

The Silvier are diminishing in numbers,—or perhaps we should say that the German-speaking Silvier are giving up their dialect. While they numbered as many as seven thousand in 1850, there are hardly three thousand now. In 1842, Issime,[3] in Val di Gressoney, half way down toward Pont St. Martin, was among the German-speaking communities: it uses a French-Italian patois now.

[1] Loche (Turin).
[2] Von Welden.
[3] Schott.

In spite of its being slowly absorbed, this *garde allemande* of the Monte Rosa, as Saussure calls it,[1] one of the nine remarkable distinctions[2] of the "Lady Mountain of the Alps," clings with almost pathetic determination to its old-time habits. The women display gay costumes with red skirts and black corsages, and adorn their hair on a Sunday with queer diadems of steel or silver balls—a mild gaiety with which to repay themselves for the heavy field and stable and porter work of the week. They have a proverb in the valley—evidently a man-made affair—according to which, "Weiber und Steine muss man lassen wo sie wachsen!" So work in Gressoney is the woman's task: the men emigrate toward the long-abandoned

[1] Saussure, vol. iv., page 385, § 2165.

[2] Saussure, vol. iv., page 386, § 2165. (Either through a special rearrangement of the book by the author or through a misprint, the paragraph 2165 is inserted directly after § 2223 and immediately preceding § 2244.) These nine remarkable facts are:

1. The height, only second to that of Mont Blanc.
2. The number and close proximity of the points.
3. The arrangement of the points in a semicircle.
4. The great number of valleys originating from it.
5. The almost horizontal disposition of the geological strata.
6. The slight inclination of the slopes.
7. The nature of the rock, in which granite in masses is rare.
8. The gold mines.
9. The "Garde Allemande."

Vaterland, and in the cities of southern Germany peddle all sorts of mountain products, from wooden spoons to cheeses. So numerous were they once in that part of the German Empire that all peddlers were, for short, called *Gressonayer*.[1] It may seem unworthy of a man to go away and leave his wife and daughters to till the fields, cut the grass, carry heavy bundles of hay, and even engage in the carrying business for others: it is a general habit, widespread in the mountains, and not an especially gross feature of the Silvier. One ought to say, however, in favour of these unchivalrous peasants, that they do more than one good thing at peddling. They bring some ready cash to the village when they come back after their winter abroad—a rare product in those places. They also bring back a good return of German language and atmosphere of civilisation, without which their persistent faithfulness to old habits would not avail to keep them Teutons: it so happens that often the Silvier, though entirely isolated, speak better German than their Swiss neighbours across the divide.

Some Silvier have even risen to fortune and high position in German states, and have come back to die in the native valley, wealthy and honoured.

[1] Forbes, page 265.

In this way came into prominence the family of Peccoz, whose founder, a successful merchant, was made baron early in the nineteenth century by the king of Bavaria. One of his descendants, recently dead, often entertained Queen Margherita of Italy in his villa at Gressoney, before her summer residence was built.

The *Gressonayer* are given to being somewhat rough and inhospitable; but contact with strangers is rapidly improving their manners. Like all the rest of the Valdostans, and their kinsmen in Valais, they are devoted Roman Catholics.

The devotion of the population of Val d' Aosta to the Church of Rome, combined with their use of a language foreign to the country, and their strong sense of local pride, has brought about the formation of a most interesting class, almost a caste, in the valley—the priests. The entire priesthood of the valley is mustered from the ranks of the peasantry. Every family devotes, or aims so to do, one of its boys to the ecclesiastical career: it is generally the brightest of all, and his cleverness by no means excludes a generous possession of the desirable physical qualities that could make him as good a soldier or a guide.

The young candidates for the priesthood are

taught the first elements of their calling by the curé of the village; then, when sufficiently advanced, they are sent to the seminary at Aosta, which makes full-fledged priests and ordains them. The Valdostan priests are therefore a thoroughly local product, and as need may arise, they are sent by the bishop of Aosta to minister in the villages of the valley. No outsiders get in; the strict, often narrow, communion of thought, customs, and dialect makes the relation between priest and congregation very intimate, and the leadership of the priest very effective. This, no doubt, reacts on the population and helps to maintain that ardent feeling of devotion to the Church, already mentioned. In all crises, people and priests stand as one person by the beliefs of their fathers, ready to defend them to the extreme, if necessary.

The priests are the picked part of the population, and the church authorities are careful to select the ablest candidates for the positions of assistants and successors. Their material condition is hardly any better than that of their faithful followers, except for the few who climb to high place in the episcopal see of Aosta; and necessity often compels them to seek pecuniary support outside of their office: many raise cattle between masses,

and run small inns between confessions. Withal, some of them develop extraordinary personalities and high mentality.

A few of them might be mentioned here as persons worthy of note. In Aosta there lived for a long time Canon George Carrel, of a Valtournanche family, a physicist of more than average value. A good mountain climber himself, with his scanty means he erected a meteorological observatory near Aosta, and through his work in it contributed precious material to the study not only of the meteorology of the high mountains, but also of glaciers and other features of local geology, of mineralogy, botany, and zoölogy. He was an appreciated friend of Forbes, Tyndall, Adams-Reilly, Nichols, Whymper, and other English naturalists and explorers, who gladly sought his advice and profited by his knowledge of the valley. He helped to make Val Tournanche and the Matterhorn famous.[1] To him is dedicated the Pic Carrel (or Becca di Nona, 10,308 ft.), south of Aosta.

The abbot Aimé Gorret, somewhat younger than Canon Carrel, died only three years ago, the curé of Valtournanche. He wore no very clerical look as he went about in heavy boots, corduroy

[1] Carrel.

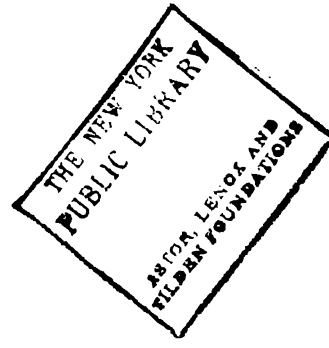
trousers, and broad felt hat, for his chief calling was the mountains. He climbed the Matterhorn on the Italian side in 1865 with the guide Carrel on the very day when Whymper, after being the first to conquer the peak, was descending on the Swiss side. After that exploit, the abbot celebrated many a mass on top of the mountain, and finally read the "De Profundis" over the corpse of his friend Carrel, the noted guide, claimed at last as a victim by his beloved "Cervino," after more than a hundred climbs.

Another venerable figure is that of the abbot Chanoux, who is in charge of the hospice on the pass of the Petit St. Bernard, still living in the retreat where he has already spent a lifetime. He is practically alone up there and passes the whole year in that high solitude, supported by a wonderful spirit of self-containment. He is an enthusiastic naturalist of great culture, who has put together a good library and created an Alpine botanical garden of wide fame; he manages the hospice, directs an observatory, and finds time to be a most sociable, courteous, and good-humoured host.

It is only natural to associate with the priests another remarkable class, which is of special

Monte Cervino (Matterhorn) from below Breuil

From a drawing by the author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glory to the valley, the guides. The occupation of guide is, for the valley of Aosta, comparatively recent. There have, of course, always been especially audacious mountaineers, who in daring pursuits, like chamois-hunting or smuggling, have ventured in perilous rock-clamberings and glacier-crossings. Two chamois hunters were credited with having reached the "shoulder" of the Matterhorn in the eighteenth century.[1] There have been also, at all times, mountaineers who guided trains of mules with travellers and merchandise over the passes into Valais and Savoy. But the idea that a comfortable city-dweller could do for pleasure what to them represented the stern necessity of hard existence, the peasants of the mountains could not for a long time take in.

The first explorers that reached Val d'Aosta, early in the nineteenth century, were deemed men more or less deranged, against whom it was well to be on one's guard. It took a great deal of money on one side and boldness on the other to persuade a villager to escort one of "those fools" in his apparently wanton play with the dangers of the Alps. Still, as the strangers kept coming, and

[1] Rey, page 108. Rey had it from the Rev. Maquignaz, who knew it from the abbot Carrel, nephew of the canon Carrel.

always well supplied with money, the first aversion of the natives was gradually overcome. The Chamoniards began quite early to offer their services as guides to their visitors, and the Valaisans promptly followed the example. It seems that they even developed a great pride in their new adventurous profession, as they went frequently with tourists into Val d' Aosta and other parts of the Alps. As late as 1860, a party including Tyndall, and led by the Valaisan Bennen, in an attempt to climb the Matterhorn, failed to reach the top only because of the haughty behaviour of Bennen, who scorned to accept the advice of the accompanying Valtournanche porters, and so missed his way when very near the end.[1]

The Valdostans were not slow to profit by the influx of foreign explorers and Chamonix guides. The foreign explorers—we may say here incidentally—were so prevalently English to begin with, that for a long time thereafter, in fact, till not many years ago, every stranger in the valley was an Englishman to the native. In the late '60's the guides of Valtournanche called *English* even Count Quintino Sella, a scientist and enthusiastic Alpinist, who was at that time Prime Minister of Italy![2]

[1] Whymper, page 121.
[2] Rey, page 99.

From the "English" they learned how to value the passing of the tourist and from the Chamoniard they learned the business of guiding. In 1855 there already existed a primitive form of guides' organisation in Valtournanche, and the local customs officers used to give certificates, stating that a guide was in condition to do what he claimed. Soon after that the Valtournanche guide rose to great fame, and to this day he has no superior in the Alps. After the *Valtourneins*, the *Gressonayer*, and the Courmayeurans, then, to a less extent, the peasants of Cogne and minor places trained themselves for the troublesome work. Now the body of guides of the Val d'Aosta, strictly organised as a guild and supervised by the Italian Alpine Club, which licenses them, is by far the best assemblage of the best trained guides in existence. No man is allowed to work as a guide unless he has served a sufficient apprenticeship as porter, and his character and habits are trustworthy.

These Val d'Aosta guides not only lead climbers up the difficult Italian side of the loftiest Alpine peaks, but are every year engaged in numbers to accompany mountain climbers in other sections of the Alps and in the mountains of other continents. Partly from Courmayeur and partly

from Valtournanche, Luigi of Savoia, Duke of the Abruzzi, recruited the guides that accompanied him in all his travels in foreign lands: to Mt. St. Elias in Alaska, toward the North Pole, to the Ruwenzori, and to the Himalayas. One of the guides, Felice Ollier of Courmayeur, disappeared with another member of the party in the dash for the Pole: a monument in the Courmayeur cemetery records his loss. From Valtournanche have gone forth guides leading parties of explorers to the Andes and the Caucasus.

Some of the Val d'Aosta guides, now passed away, left behind a void that has been keenly felt by those who knew them: their names are like the names of great men, remembered with the respect of admiration, their adventures are recalled and recounted like the campaigns of great generals. These guides belonged to the Heroic Age of Alpinism, when a new and fiery enthusiasm caused men of strong bodies and steady nerves to dare unknown and untried peaks in search of fame and fresh emotions. Now Alpinism has become a somewhat tamer and almost commonplace sport, and the guide appears rather the professional carrier of provisions—and, incidentally, of unwieldy tourists,—who treads beaten paths for money, than the hero who defies a world of

nature fraught with mysterious perils. Like knights of adventure in olden times, the great guides have almost all died on the field of battle: in the long struggle between men and mountains, the mountains have been conquered, but they have never failed to take grim and bloody revenge.

Jean Antoine Carrel, of Valtournanche, was perhaps the most striking figure among the heroic guides. He was the best rock-climber known,[1] and a devoted lover of the mountains; he was the conqueror of the Matterhorn on the Italian side, and had the ambition of independent conquest. Though he accompanied Whymper several times in the latter's attempts, he regarded him not as a superior, but rather as an undesirable competitor. He finally did reach the top, alone with a porter; and if he could not enjoy the cherished glory of being the first of all men to set his foot on the summit, he could rejoice in the fact that the return of his party was unmarred by catastrophe. On the 24th of August, 1890, Carrel, then sixty-two years old, was with a tourist and a porter surprised by storm on the Matterhorn and forced to retreat to the upper *cabane*. The storm did not abate for two days and food ran out; the party had to descend through sleet and fog over

[1] Whymper, page 81.

the most dangerous points. Carrel brought his companions to safety on the rocks of the lower mountains, then fell, and his eyes closed for the night that is without earth's morning. Though his body was interred at Valtournanche, his mountain stands as his monument[1]: a cross marks the spot where he fell.

On the 17th of July of the same year, the Mont Blanc, the white mountain with a black conscience, the magician of the fiendish storm, claimed the life of another guide of Valtournanche: Jean Joseph Maquignaz. He also was in the hot race, run between 1860 and 1865, for the escalade of the *Cervin*. He could not beat Carrel to the top, as Carrel could not beat Whymper, but like Carrel and Whymper, he had his share of triumph. Carrel had followed a route that, after taking him to the base of the final cone on the Italian side, led him over the Swiss side (Zmutt) for the last stretch. To everybody, including that "best of rock-climbers," the last part on the Italian side had appeared impossible; but Maquignaz was not of that opinion and went straight up, discovering, in 1867, the shortest cut. Maquignaz disappeared with another guide and a tourist in the Mont Blanc chain,—where and how, the glaciers do not tell.

[1] L. Sinigaglia.

Another victim of the Mont Blanc was Emile Rey, of Courmayeur, the guide-gentleman, whose kindly manners and culture, unusual for a man of his station, made him the favourite of the better class of climbers. He had conquered the Aiguille Noire de Pétéret (1877), with Lord Wentworth, and the Aiguille Blanche (1885)—one of the most hazardous climbs in the Alps—with King. He lost his life at a comparatively easy point by slipping over rocks, just a few minutes after having untied the tourist he was leading, because "all danger was over."

Nothing would be pleasanter than to end a chapter on the Valdostans with such interesting types as the priests and the guides, were that possible; but, for the sake of completeness, mention must be made of those miserable beings that mar the beauty and the charm of these Alpine retreats—the cretins.

Bad as the scourge is, some travellers have tried to make it appear even worse. Whymper,[1] speaking of the Val d'Aosta, says, "It is famous for its *bouquetins* (ibex) and infamous for its cretins." As the ibex is a feature, and an exclusive one,[2] the reader might, by analogy, be

[1] Whymper, page 282. [2] See chapter iii., page 75.

induced to suppose that the like is true of the cretins: this is not so, however. Cretinism is a form of idiocy in an extreme stage, which is widely spread over the mountainous districts of almost the whole world, though more notably in the Alps. The cretins are utterly and hopelessly degenerate, physically and mentally; they are undersized, disfigured by goitre and scabs, incapable of talking, and, as a rule, limit their voluntary movements to the carrying of food to their mouths.

In France, cretinism is to be found in thirty-two *Departments*[1] and goitre in thirty-five.[2] Savoy is more affected by cretinism than is the Val d'Aosta, having sixteen cretins in a thousand, according to the most recent statistics,[3] while the Val d'Aosta has but 3.24%.[4] The Austrian provinces of Styria, Salzburg, and Carynthia have a somewhat lower percentage (2.18–2.97%), but the Austrian statistics are suspected of being altogether under rate.[5] The distribution of cretinism is, moreover, very uneven: while the valley of Cogne, as well as the town of Aosta and its environs, is sadly privileged in this respect,

[1] Map of Baillanger, *ex* Mayet. [2] Mayet.
[3] Official Statistics, *ex* Weygandt.
[4] Weygandt. [5] Wagner, *ex* Weygandt.

the valleys of Savaranche, Tournanche, and Gressoney are practically immune. Between Martigny and Brigue, Valais is infested with this disease.

The cretins of the valley of Aosta make a miserable spectacle, it is true; more so than is necessary, as many roam freely in the villages and importune strangers, begging with the most obdurate insistence, and forcing into evidence their horrid bodies. The evil is, however, being partially remedied by coralling the unfortunate creatures in institutions, where they are decently taken care of.

Cretinism is an old plague in the Alps. It is said to have been known in ancient times, and was described at length in the seventeenth century [1]; but although numerous physicians have since studied the disease, made experimental researches and trials *in corpore vili*, its cause is almost as much of a mystery as in centuries past. The only certain data about it are the following: that cretinism belongs exclusively to mountainous districts (although not necessarily in the narrowest valleys); that it is connected with goitre (although goitrous people are not necessarily cretins); that it is connected, like goitre, with the atrophy of the thyroid gland; that it is transmitted

[1] By Paracelsus in *De Generatione Stultorum*. Strassburg, 1616.

by heredity. Beyond this, not much is to be gathered, although the literature on the subject is extremely abundant. In 1867, a diligent investigator collected as many as forty-two causes assigned for it[1]: the lack of light and air, the temperature, the vegetable diet, the use of pork, alcoholism, intermarriage, the nature of waters and air, and what not else beside! One official document[2] seriously advances the theory that sin is the cause of the malady, and that confession and the *Brautexamen* would be good remedies; in which one may, if he will, see a deeper truth under the theologic expression.

Impurities in water and air are the causes most generally accepted, and as a matter of fact, modern research, without succeeding in exactly locating the trouble, does point to water[3] and air[4] as the agents chiefly responsible—to air still more than to water, as had already been very definitely contended by certain students many years ago.[5]

[1] St. Lager.

[2] Enquête des Bayr. Min. Abel.

[3] *Cfr.* case of French soldiers stricken by goitre at Nancy, because of the use of certain waters; and case of disappearance of goitre from Rapperschwyl after the building of an aqueduct in 1885,—*ex* Weygandt.

[4] B. Grassi and L. Munaron. These authors attribute goitre and cretinism to a lack of iodine salts in the air.

[5] Loche (Turin).

Knowledge on the subject being still so hazy, it is small wonder that no results have been attained in the cure of the disease. Doctors Grassi and Munaron, starting from their theory that cretinism is due to lack of atmospheric iodine, have attempted cure by the internal action of iodine and have been able slightly to improve the condition[1] of some adult patients. The administration of the extract of the thyroid gland of the sheep has also had some effect in reducing goitres. But so far there is not much definite and conclusive material to rely upon; the cretin still wanders aimlessly about, emitting uncanny sounds from his distorted mouth, a clouded intelligence in a useless body—a horrible example of the miseries that flourish by the side of the divine glory of the great mountains.

[1] B. Grassi and L. Munaron.

CHAPTER III

THE FOUR GREAT PEAKS

MOUNTAINS may seem all alike to him who considers them from afar, but to those who behold them near at hand, and still more to those who live under their lee, they assume so well-defined a personality as to make them seem almost living human beings.

There are four giants in the valley of Aosta, giants of beauty and of terror: Mont Blanc (15,771 ft.), Monte Rosa (15,200 ft.), Monte Cervino, or Matterhorn (14,691 ft.), and Gran Paradiso (13,223 ft.). We bar out the Grand Combin and the Dent d'Hérens, although their lofty heights could rightfully claim for them a place among the worthies, because the first is properly on Swiss territory, and the second is so overshadowed by the Matterhorn that no place of distinction is left for it, though, alone, it might tower illustrious.

The four giants are each of the same earth-stuff

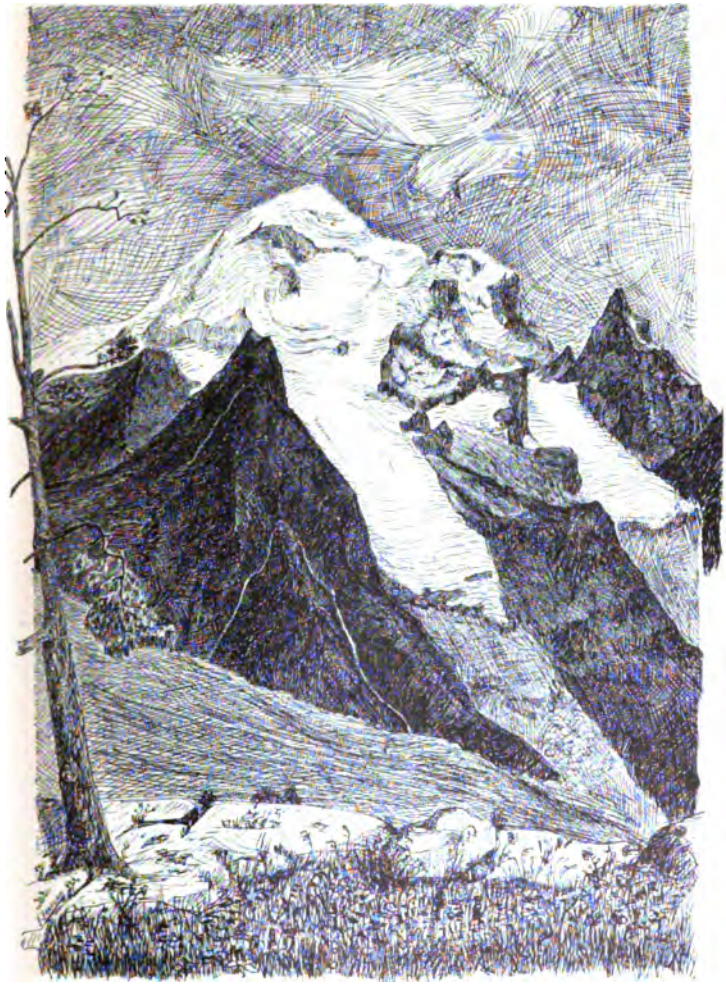
as the others and all the rest of the Alps, rock and ice; and yet how unlike they are! Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa are ranges, long and wide; the Matterhorn is a lonely peak; and the Gran Paradiso, neither—a dominating height, a few ridges, and some smaller points set in fields of ice; it is a mountain knot, rather than a range. Again, Mont Blanc presents in the most striking form the contrast already mentioned between the outer and the inner side of the Alpine chain. While on the Chamonix side it holds vast ice plateaus, interminable glaciers, in its gently sloping hollows, on the Courmayeur side it presents the most chaotic wilderness of rocks: towering needles, precipices of unsuspected reach, arêtes sharp and ragged as fins, here and there a glacier showing over the brink of an abyss, torn front and flank by avalanches; only two or three glaciers, after monstrous leaps, have been able to stretch into the lower valley, like surreptitious fingers.

Withal, Mont Blanc, monarch of the Alps though it be, has something disappointing about it; it has too stagy a setting, like that surrounding a great actor who wants all the glory, the success, and the cash of a tournée for himself alone. The range is very long, but no point in it, except Mont Blanc proper, exceeds the height of 14,000 feet:

the Grandes Jorasses and a few other points—Aiguille Verte and Aiguille de Bionassay—slightly exceed 13,000 feet. For Alpine points of note, all the rest of the *Aiguilles* are a crowd of mediocrities; though some of them offer tough scaling for Alpinistic feats, they are to the summit like the chorus around a First Tenor, who is further distinguished by the elegance of a white wig.

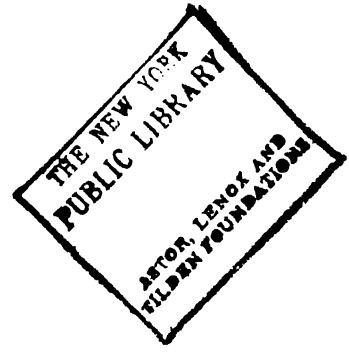
Monte Rosa, though partaking, in a general way, of the physical features of the rest of the chain, has broader shoulders toward the Italian side—that part, at least, which overlooks the Val d'Aosta—and does not, like Mont Blanc, look as if it had shaken off all superfluous glaciers with a royal shrug. Only over Macugnaga, to the east, does it precipitate with a most wonderful and rarely equalled chasm. Not so forbidding as Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa has at the same time considerably more dignity and consistency in itself. It is, in a way, a democratic mountain of high standing; well and neatly clad in white, it is uniform in looks and character.

The average height of Monte Rosa is greater than that of Mont Blanc, though its highest point is lower; of the twelve or more peaks that make up the range, only three or four toward the ends (Breithorn, Twins, Jägerhorn) fall short of



Mont Blanc (highest point) from Mont Fortin

From a drawing by the author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14,000 feet; of the others, six reach or surpass 15,000 (Dufour, Nordend, Zumstein, Gnifetti, Lyskamm, Parrot). This venerable array of white heads, all looming high into the clouds, makes as impressive a sight as that of a company of sages, wise, friendly, and self-respecting.

Mont Blanc poses; Monte Rosa is gentle and gracious. As for the Matterhorn, it seems to embody all the characteristics of a stormy dare-devil; while the Gran Paradiso is solid and well-balanced, quite the business man.

Owing to the fact that the villages at its base on both sides were very early visited by strangers, Mont Blanc was the first peak of the Alps to attract the attention of climbers. The first attempts, unsuccessful and successful, were made from Chamonix,—the natural way to try first, since it is much less irksome and rough than the Courmayeur side. Consideration of the difficulty, however, never played any great part in choosing the point of attack on a mountain in those days when the dangers of such enterprises were unknown and but dimly conceived; and ascents were tried on the French, the Swiss, or the Italian side, indiscriminately, according to the spot where the explorers happened to reach the bottom.

The first men who made a trial at Mont Blanc were English,[1] but two Chamoniards were the first to succeed: the guide J. Balmat and the doctor of the village, Paccard (1786). In 1787, the scientist, Horace Benedict de Saussure, of Geneva, climbed with a party of seventeen in the footsteps of Balmat, and stopped many hours on the summit for observations. The carelessness of those early climbers is well illustrated by an engraving of the time, showing the party as they leisurely strolled down a glacier, with no ropes and no picks, scattered about as if they were on a pleasure jaunt through a pasture field. Still, this confident indifference to the perils of the heights did not seem to bring any evil consequence upon the early explorers.

From the Italian side, Mont Blanc was not ascended till 1840.[2]

As soon as the fear of the unknown was dispelled, interest in mountains developed rapidly. Parties, at first mainly of scientists, began to explore the great range of the Mont Blanc in all directions. In 1863, Adams-Reilly made a very accurate survey of the whole group and in 1864

[1] Windham, 1741.

[2] F. Giordano, the organiser of the first Matterhorn ascent, 1840.

published a map of it.[1] In 1865, another map was made by Captain Mieulet of the French army.[2] These two charts stand yet as the best topographical authorities of the region. In the making of his map, Adams-Reilly was helped by Edward Whymper; the two together, or Whymper alone, scaled many untouched peaks (Aiguille de Trelatête, Aiguille d'Argentière, Grandes Jorasses, Mont Dolent, etc.) and tried many passes (Col Dolent, Col de Talèfre, Col Triolet.[3] Now the Mont Blanc has become quite commonplace, specially on the French side, where cog-wheel roads are ever ready to lift the weak and the lazy. On the Italian side the ascent is still an Alpinistic feat of valour, as the slopes are steep and there is no substitute for one's own hands and feet.

The ascent is generally made by the Glacier du Miage, avoiding its upper feeders by reaching the Dome du Goûter and ending on the French side. A variation of this route takes the climber from the Glacier du Miage up the Glacier du Mont Blanc, although this is likely to be dangerous on account of avalanches. The peak has also been climbed by its dizzy rock-face and the small

[1] Scale 1: 80,000, published through English Alpine Club.

[2] Scale 1: 40,000, published by the French War Office, under the name of "*Massif du Mont Blanc.*"

[3] Whymper, *passim.*

glaciers of Brouilliard and Fresney, to the right of the Miage, as well as by the glacier of the Brenva—all three enterprises of the most foolhardy, as the risk from avalanches is there always imminent.

When we face the range from the opposite side of the Allée Blanche, we cannot see all the twenty or more needles that jut out from it, for many rise out of the ridges in the valley of the Arve. The most important points, however, including Mont Blanc proper, are on the divide.[1]

The advance sentinels of the range on the left are the Aiguille du Glacier and the Aiguille de Trelatête; to the right of them, the ridge describes a broad semicircle which, reaching its most outward point at the Aiguille de Bionassay, ends in the highest peak of the range. From the middle of this wide amphitheatre flows out the long and narrow ice-stream of the Glacier du Miage, down into the lower valley, till it almost skirts the torrent Dora in the Allée Blanche. From its lower end this glacier is flat and easy for a long dis-

[1] For the nomenclature of the points of Mont Blanc, the French name of *Aiguille* (needle) or *Dent* (tooth) is most frequently adopted; for those of Monte Rosa, instead, the German suffix of *Horn* or *Spitze* is more common. The Italians use the French and German nomenclatures equally with the Italian form *Punta* (peak). The natives have the local *patois* name of *Bec* for peak.

tance; then it rises all of a sudden, reaching practically to the top of Mont Blanc, at an almost impossible angle. Its upper part is perhaps the steepest ice body known (over 50°),—almost an incredible fact that a mass of slippery ice, held to the rock by no force except its own weight, can stand in such a position. The impression of an ice-fall is so vivid that it has been compared to Niagara Falls.[1] Down the frightful steep thunder the avalanches almost uninterruptedly. The Glacier du Miage has pushed toward the valley an immense mass of débris and built it into a huge moraine, which has blocked the passage of waters and formed the lake of Combal. There is a dam at the outlet of the lake, which was built long ago, it is said, for the purpose of raising the level of the lake and flooding the passage, to prevent the entrance of troops into Piedmont.[2]

As we follow the lacerated line of the divide beyond Mont Blanc proper, we come upon another glacier that flows low toward the valley, the glacier of the Brenva,—also very easy at the bottom and very steep at the top. In the middle of it, a huge rocky wall protrudes through a rent in the

[1] Basil Hall, *ex* Forbes, page 18.
[2] Saussure, chap. xxx., § 853.

ice and offers a spectacular stand for the discharge of avalanches.

Farther to the right, opens in a comparatively low depression (10,980 ft.) the only pass in the whole chain of the Mont Blanc that is at all practicable and reasonably facile, although it makes a trying rock scramble necessary in the ascent from Courmayeur and a wearisome tramp over the interminable Mer de Glace in the descent to Chamonix. De Saussure in his explorations of the range reached the Col du Géant in 1788 and camped there for sixteen days, making scientific observations of all kinds; he would have stayed longer if his guides had not wearied of their long, enforced idleness and destroyed the provisions to force him to retreat. The inhabitants of Courmayeur had uneasily observed his camp on the lofty pass: they were suffering from drought in those days and began to think that there was a sorcerer up there, whose magical arts were responsible for the drying out of the springs; they had even planned to send a deputation to investigate matters, when Saussure appeared among them.[1] The fact that they thought of a deputation and not of an armed or an exorcising expedition, shows that they were not afraid of that pass,

[1] Forbes, page 67.

at least, and monsters were supposed to live elsewhere. Courmayeur and Chamonix had, in fact, for a long time been in communication over the Col du Géant, and a legend tells how, many centuries ago, Chamonix having been left without a church, the Chamoniards used to come over that pass to Courmayeur for mass every Sunday—a most extraordinary exhibition of piety, under the most favourable of conditions, even if the Mer de Glace did not exist at that time, since the crossing requires never fewer than twelve hours of march.

Not far from the Col du Géant, rises the Aiguille du Géant, a reef of small proportions, hardly three hundred feet high, standing out like a thumb from a hand, impregnable all around, as it is nearly vertical or overhangs on all sides. There is not much to be gained by climbing it, to be sure, but the very fact of its defiance of human efforts puzzled the Alpinists and made them dare it again and again. Some one even attempted to lasso the apex and hoist himself up, but to no avail. In 1882 four brothers Sella finally did get themselves to the top of the thumb, but their conquest was rather prosaic: they had men drive iron spikes into the rock for four successive days and then—went up the ladder! It was a

hazardous enterprise none the less, since it takes a good head and a firm hand-grip to climb a 300-foot ladder.

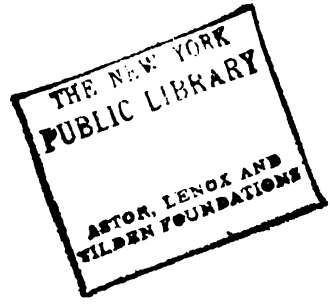
Beyond the Dent du Géant, the range reaches its second highest point in the ugly Grandes Jorasses, a stiff rock climb, and then extends as far as the Mont Dolent, where it passes out of Italy.

An admirable observation point for an almost completely unobstructed view of the *massif* of the Mont Blanc, is the Mont Crammont, above Courmayeur. Its position and height (8980 ft.) are such that it affords also a wonderful survey over the whole Val d'Aosta and all the peaks of the Graian and Pennine Alps; moreover, it is easy of ascent and a *cabane* on its top can give shelter in bad weather. The Mont Chetif (7687 ft.), a curious sugar-loaf-shaped mountain north of the Mont Crammont, is another good observatory; somewhat lower than the latter, it gives a better view of the immediately underlying Allée Blanche, but the view is intercepted beyond the Grandes Jorasses. The best point of vantage is said to be in Val Ferret, between La Vachey and Praz Sec, at any spot of the southern slope above three thousand feet,[1]—not, however, easy to

[1] Whymper, page 334, note.

The Aiguille (or Dent) du Géant, Mt. Blanc Range

From a photograph by Signor Origoni of Milan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reach. From the Col de Ferret the panorama of the Mont Blanc chain is very poor; but, on the other hand, the side view of the magnificent outworks, so to speak, of Mont Blanc proper, rising into the Aiguilles de Pétéret, is unsurpassed.

The history of the Monte Rosa is more modest than that of the Mont Blanc; its own sons were long its only devotees. A party of peasants that climbed once from Gressoney to the divide, told on their return of having discovered a fruitful plain on the top, where cows pastured in grass jewelled with flowers, happily jingling their bells, while the herders yodled merrily in the sun. Those who later followed, found that the tale was true—with this difference, that what the peasants had seen was not a plain on top of Monte Rosa, but the bowl of Zermatt, so completely encircled by glaciers and high mountains that it seemed to have no exit. This little story, which some of the oldest inhabitants still living in Gressoney have at first hand from those who discovered the fairy-land, gives fresh proof that the Silvier of Gressoney were never in touch with their kinsmen of Valais, over the mountains that separated them.

A Gressonayer by the name of Vincent ascended in 1819 the point that in his honour was

called Vincent Pyramide. Shortly afterward, Vincent made a second ascent with a compatriot, by name Zumstein; they were accompanied by a miner from the gold mines near Col d'Olen, and a hunter. They climbed from the Col d'Olen, by way of the glacier of Indren and then by arête.[1] The expedition very nearly ended in a catastrophe, for the hunter was seized by mountain sickness while in a perilous position; but fortunately he recovered promptly. Zumstein, enlightened by this little incident, refused to have the party roped: if some one were to fall, there was no need of his dragging anybody else with him, thought the prudent Gressonayer.

When he reached the top of the Vincent Pyramide, Zumstein realised that there were still higher points in the group; and the following year he went up the peak that was afterward called the Zumsteinspitze in his honour. At that time there was a great deal of discussion as to whether Monte Rosa was higher than Mont Blanc or not, and Zumstein, through measurements that later proved incorrect, and urged perhaps by a bit of village pride, was inclined to support the claims of Monte Rosa. It was not until the Smith brothers reached in 1855 the

[1] Zumstein (Turin).

highest point of the range, named Dufourspitze for the Swiss general *Dufour*, that the matter of the real height of the Monte Rosa was settled, in favour of its rival.

Another man of Gressoney, Abbot Gnifetti, climbed in 1842 the point which is called Punta Gnifetti in Italian and Signal Kuppe in German.

While the Monte Rosa can be seen in full extension from the heights above Zermatt, the six lofty ridges that spring from it toward Italy divide the range into many sections, which are visible only one at a time from the various valleys. He who persists in having a comprehensive view of this second among the *colossi* of the Alps, can find it by going to the top of Mont Zerbion, a point (8913 ft.) just above St. Vincent, at mid-length in the valley of Aosta and a long way from the Monte Rosa itself. That part of the range from the Breithorn to the Punta Gnifetti stands then in full sight with its broad glaciers and its rounded cupolas. At the Punta Gnifetti, the direction of the range changes suddenly, making a sharp angle with the first part, thus offering its narrower side to the observer, and a rather crowded view in perspective of the points from the Parrotspitze to Nord End. The onlooker is, however, repaid by

the superb panorama of the Matterhorn and all the other peaks of the valley in all directions.

The ascent of all the points of the Monte Rosa to be reached from the valley of Aosta is the easiest to be found in the high Alps. At the Punta Gnifetti, which is the peak more frequently scaled, one arrives by following the glacier of Garstelet to the Lys pass, and then traversing the comfortably sloping snow fields on the Swiss side. The way is made attractive almost to seductiveness by three Alpine refuges, the Capanna Sinty, the Capanna Gnifetti, and the Capanna Regina Margherita on the top. Both the Gnifetti and Regina Margherita huts have restaurant service during the season; the last-named, a comparatively large building, 80 by 10 feet, with seven rooms, has three rooms set aside for scientific laboratories. The glacier under the Punta Gnifetti is so "good" and level that Queen Margherita of Italy in her climb of the peak in 1893 was pulled in a sleigh over it to the base of the final point.

Easy as is the ascent of the Monte Rosa, it is always claiming its full share of victims. A party tried the Punta Giordani on New Year's day of 1894; they were a group of dashing young men from Turin, some very wealthy and all in

search of sensation. The extremely low temperature and the difficulties encountered, due to the heavy snow, killed one of them and marred for life two others, who had to have their frozen feet cut off.

The ridge coming down from the Vincent Pyramide, which forms the dividing line between the valley of Gressoney and Val Sesia, thus marking the extreme oriental confines of the valley of Aosta, is crossed near the end of the Glacier d' Embours, by a mule path, leading from Gressoney to Alagna, over the pass of Olen. On this pass, almost 10,000 feet above sea-level, is a small but comfortable hotel, which can also be used as a point of departure for Monte Rosa ascensions. On the little plateau where the hotel stands, there was erected in 1907 another building; in it have been placed the scientific laboratories created through the efforts of Professor Angelo Mosso of the University of Turin, for the study of the high regions. They are fitted up for researches in botany, zoölogy, bacteriology, physiology, terrestrial physics, and meteorology, and have accommodations for eighteen students; the privilege of using them is granted, on application to Prof. Mosso, to students of all nationalities, two places being reserved for English and one

for American scientists.[1] The three rooms at the Capanna Regina Margherita, used respectively for physiology, terrestrial physics, and a living apartment, are kept as a branch of the laboratories of Col d' Olen, when altitudes still higher are to be investigated.

The Matterhorn is the mountain around which the battle for conquest waged longest: its reputation of inaccessibility, the ease with which it baffled human effort, the rivalry that the repeated attempts excited among climbers of fame, and the stupendous catastrophe that darkened the first success gave an epic zest to the contest, the memory of which is still fresh around the "sinister syren."

For centuries, men had gone over the Théodule pass, within a stone's throw from its cliffs; but none had stopped longer than to cast a hurried glance upward, while crossing himself at the wooden statue of St. Théodule,[2] or taking shelter in the little chapel from impending storm[3]: that eerie height, around which cawed the strange

[1] Mosso (Lincei).

[2] A statue to the bishop St. Théodule, protector of the pass, stood on top of it in the XVIIIth century.—Vaccarone (Vie), document 9, page 115.—No longer there.

[3] According to Canon Carrel, still there in 1743; no longer in existence.—Rey, page 89.

grey Alpine crows, and from which mysterious rumbles echoed over the ice below, was inhabited by a fierce ogre. Even the origin of the lonely peak was uncanny: there was no Cervino once, they will tell you in the valley, but a lofty ridge, all as high as the peak is now; and there was a giant who lived in the neighbourhood and used to step over the ridge from Val Tournanche into Valais, any time he needed. Once when he was just astride the ridge in passing from one side to the other, a mighty quake shook the earth, and the ridge was shattered, all but that part which the giant held between his legs,—that stood, and remained the Cervino.

As the years rolled by, the statue of the bishop fell and rotted in the ice, which still held the scattered pieces[1]; the chapel crumbled into dust, and yet, though the fear of the ogre subsided, no man looked at the mountain without shaking his head.

Once an Englishman asked Canon Carrel if he thought the ascent feasible; Carrel replied that if the feat were possible it would be great gain for his valley; and shortly afterward, in 1857, a party of young men, including J. Antoine Carrel and Aimé Gorret, then a student of theology, started for the summit. They reached only the Tête du

[1] A hand was found by Rey. Rey, page 89.

Lion, but they began to see at close quarters that the mountain was not so terrible as they had supposed.

From that moment, open war was declared upon the defiant peak, practically the only one of any consequence left for men of determination, and—as Canon Carrel had clearly foreseen—Val Tournanche began to experience a boom. There was a little inn at the Giomein, above Breuil[1]; this became the general headquarters for parties of attack and developed in later years into the first-class hotel that now entertains every year a choice gathering of summer guests. A stone hut was built on the Théodule with lodging and restaurant; incidentally this led to a curious legal fight as to who is the owner of a glacier.[2] In Valtournanche, too, and Breuil, accommodations for visitors soon improved.

All the earlier attempts to climb the Matterhorn were made from the Italian side, which is much more difficult than the Swiss. Between 1860 and 1864 the contest was carried on by two Englishmen, the famous physicist Tyndall and Edward Whymper, with Carrel in turn helping each of them and

[1] 1856. Gorret and Bich.

[2] The story of this hut is to be found in Rey. Engelhardt mentions its first owner, slightly misspelling his name (Minette instead of Meynet).

trying for himself. Tyndall came twice very near success, in 1860 and in 1862, when he reached a point just below the final peak, named for him Pic Tyndall. Whymper, in his anxiety to be first, even tried, on one occasion (1862) when he was unable to find guides, to make the ascent alone, and all but left his life in forfeit to his impetuosity; by 1863 he had made six attempts. The year 1864 was one of truce.

In 1865, Tyndall had abandoned the field, but in his stead there appeared an Italian, Felice Giordano, a civil engineer and a friend of Quintino Sella, then Prime Minister of Italy. Since the Premier encouraged and even planned to join Giordano, the contest became an international affair. Both parties tried to secure the precious help of Carrel, but Carrel finally sided with the Italians. This fact led Whymper to accuse him of duplicity, inasmuch as he had promised Whymper to be at his disposal until the 11th of July, but joined the Italians on the 9th.[1] The fact is, that Carrel had promised his services to Whymper on condition that the weather were fair, but changed allegiance when the weather turned bad, as is evident from the letters of Giordano to Sella.[2] Carrel was

[1] Whymper, pages 366–367.
[2] Published in Rey, pages 132–138.

clearly looking for his own chance to be the first up, and when Giordano asked him to choose a few companions and go with them to find and prepare a way, he saw it and seized it. Whymper, irritated at what he thought was open defection, hurried over the Théodule to Zermatt and joined the expedition that was successful on the 15th of July and was almost exterminated on the 16th. While Carrel with some guides had begun descending below the final peak, after picking out a passage that could lead to the top, Michel Croz, the Chamoniard who had led Whymper and his colleagues to the summit, called to him, jeering, and threw some stones to make the presence of his party known. Whymper says that Carrel's party, discomfited, turned and ran[1]; this, however, is not exact.

As soon as Carrel reached the Giomein, a new party was immediately organised with the abbot Gorret in it, and he started again. "If the priest goes along, success is sure," said somebody in jest; the party did actually reach the bottom of the final peak on the 18th of July, and Carrel, leaving the others, climbed with Bich to the top and planted a flag in the snow. He did not then know that Michel Croz, the "best of all connoisseurs of ice,"

[1] Whymper, page 379.

had paid with his life the innocent boasting of two days before. The Matterhorn had claimed a Mont Blanc guide, as the Mont Blanc later claimed the Matterhorn guide Maquignaz.

Giordano went up with Carrel in 1866 and stayed for five days encamped at the so-called "cravatte," whence an unwelcome telegram called him down.

Since those days, ascensions have been frequent, and are now made easier by ropes and spikes, and two huts toward the top. Once the Matterhorn was ascended in winter (1882); The Swiss side has gained a great deal on the Italian in popularity, because of the greater safety of the climb, and of the development of Zermatt.

An attempt was once made by Guido Rey to scale the mountain along the arête that ends at the Breuiljoch and is prolonged to the Théodule. The climber was determined to go just that way and no other, and since the rocks are vertical, or even overhanging on that side, he sent guides to the top by the regular route, who lowered him seven hundred feet of rope—and up he went. In spite of this foolhardy device, he did not succeed in his "stunt," as he and the two guides remaining with him were so exhausted when within a hundred feet from the end of the rope, that they had to rest

on a narrow ledge under an overhanging bluff, and then shin back their long rope, pieces of which still hang and swing aimlessly in the wind. M. Rey's only reward in this affair was to be called *fou* by the *Journal de Genève;* and yet he was otherwise a sane and most respectable gentleman.[1]

We do not know any reason why the Gran Paradiso should bear such a seraphic name, unless it be taken to indicate that the mountain with its ample white robe of ice, its dark green forests, its good-naturedness to man, suggests a peace and rest not mundane. For the opposite reason, Mont Blanc used once to be referred to as Mont Maudit, the accursed. To complete the illusion of this Valdostan Eden, chamois and ibex, gathered in numerous herds around the slopes of the mountain, enjoy in blissful security their carefully guarded haunts. One should not, however, treat the Gran Paradiso with too much familiarity, even though it have not the éclat of the Matterhorn, nor the aplomb of the Mont Blanc and the Monte Rosa, and even though it be an Eden, for Eden, as tradition teaches, was not inherently a safe place for man.

We said that the Gran Paradiso is a guarded retreat for its four-footed inhabitants. This is

[1] Rey, page 280.

not absolutely true, because the chamois, which are plentiful, are only partially protected by a restricted hunting period. It is the ibex that is entirely safeguarded by the unconditional prohibition of the hunt in any form, at any time; only the kings of Italy, who are in a legal sense the owners and keepers of the game, are allowed the privilege of shooting at ibex, but they make very discreet and infrequent use of it.

The Gran Paradiso is the last stand of the ibex among European mountains. It once roamed about in great numbers in the highest regions of the whole system of the Alps,[1] and even as recently as fifty years ago there were enough left to permit free hunting[2]; but their dominions have been so quickly reduced with the appearance of tourists in the Alps, that only severe vigilance can preserve their last haunts from devastation and their race from extermination. At present, the number of ibex is calculated at about six hundred head; for their protection are deputed some forty royal *guardacaccia* (hunting guards), stationed at Cogne.

The ibex is a graceful creature, rather large and extraordinarily vigorous, about four feet in height to the bottom of the horns. Though similarity of habit makes it a close companion of the chamois,

[1] Simlerius, page 336. [2] Aubert, page 83.

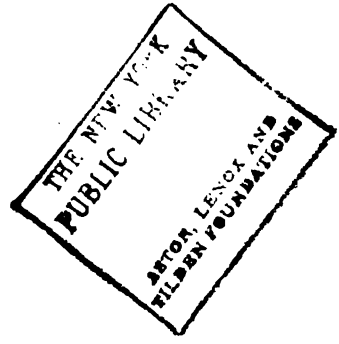
the ibex is quite another animal in appearance as well as in natural affinity; while the chamois is an antelope (*Capella rupicapra*, Erx.), the ibex is a goat (*Capra ibex*, L.) and wears the typical chin-beard of the goat. The chamois is tamer and often descends in winter to mingle with the sheep, but the ibex is never seen below its own fastnesses, remote and high. The chamois has small horns, while the ibex displays an imposing pair as much as three feet long, slightly arched and curiously cross-ridged—every ridge corresponding, it is said, to a year of its life.

Wonderful tales are told of this rare animal: that when a year old he can jump the height of a man from a standstill; that he stands erect, snuffing, exhilarated, in the hardest storms of the Alps; that when old, he commits suicide by dashing himself over a precipice [1]; that he jumps from high rocks upon his horns as springs; that he goes blind if he cannot keep within sight of ice.[2] All of which may or may not be true, but are hard, indeed impossible, to verify, considering the extreme difficulty of reaching the ibex within distance allowing of observation. Admirably swift across glaciers and up steep mountain sides, incredibly sure-footed on ice and bad rock, unsurpassedly

[1] Tschudi, pages 531 *et seq.* [2] Simlerius, page 336.

Among the Glaciers of the Gran Paradiso

From a drawing by the author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agile in clearing wide crevasses at a jump, the ibex undoubtedly is—and he is so shy and keen-scented that man rarely gets a glimpse of him.

The ibex, at any rate, is the chief cause of the notoriety of the Gran Paradiso and the valleys leading to it—Val Cogne and Val Savaranche; to it also, though more directly to King Victor Emmanuel II's fondness for hunting it, those valleys and those mountains owe a net of splendid hunting paths, crossing in all directions, reaching to great heights, and ending in the permanent camps used by the king. If getting into those valleys is uncomfortable work, once in, the traveller can roam at ease where in other valleys he would be toiling along pathless ravines—at ease,—that is, provided he does not carry a gun!

CHAPTER IV

THE PASSES OF ST. BERNARD

THE road that leads to the pass of the Grand St. Bernard starts from the town of Aosta, and, following closely the direction of the Buthier, reaches the village of Gignod. There it turns toward the west, leaving the valleys of Ollomont and Pelline on the right, and climbs slowly, always keeping near the torrent (which at this point is only one of three branches uniting to form the Buthier) and, passing through Étroubles and St. Rhémy, reaches the pass (8082 feet). The stage road from St. Rhémy to the pass, to connect with the Swiss stage road from the pass to Martigny, is of recent construction (1904); that it remained so long unbuilt is surely not due to the fact that no need of it was felt. This is so true that there was once talk of building a road, which, branching out at Étroubles and winding up the wild gorge of Menouve, should cross the pass of this name and descend to meet the Swiss road of St. Bernard near Bourg St. Pierre[1];

[1] Aubert, page 243.

it was even more than talk, as some work was done on a tunnel under the pass, which was to shorten the road and make its gradient easier.

That the work was later abandoned was great good fortune, because the way over the Col de Menouve would have avoided none of the disadvantages of the St. Bernard Pass, and would have closed the long history of a celebrated place. Moreover, it would have made an end to a privilege that the population of the little hamlet of St. Rhémy have enjoyed for over two centuries, the privilege of not serving in the regular Italian army, according to the iron rules of the conscription law. It is a matter of conjecture whether the young men of St. Rhémy are much elated over this favour that is so generously bestowed upon them, since they have to pay for it with ten years' service in keeping the road of the pass free from snow in winter—and it snows so, up that way! There is record of mountaineers in past centuries who humbly petitioned their lords to restore to them taxes and similar burdens, provided they would free them from the "privilege" of keeping the roads open and acting as guides to the winter travellers. Still, since the folk of St. Rhémy do not complain, though nothing would be easier for them than to claim the dominion of the common law in these

democratic times, one may conclude that they consider theirs the less of two unavoidable evils.

The traveller who arrives at the highest point of this transalpine road, after the dreary passing of the last part of the ascent in rocky and desolate ravines swept by chilling winds, finds himself cheered by the sight of a plain of considerable size for the altitude, by the appearance of a lake, and the prospective hospitality of two large buildings put there for his comfort and known as the Hospice of the Grand St. Bernard. The existence of a lake at that height may at first seem strange, but it is nothing remarkable; many Alpine passes have lakes on their summits, sometimes of more than indifferent proportions (Mont Cenis, St. Gottard), which serve to very good purpose in supplying most delicious trout to the refuges near by—that is, when it is possible to get at the lake at all!

The Grand St. Bernard is one of the coldest places in Europe, and the lake is frozen over, solid, for at least eight months a year; during this period of long winter, men and vehicles go straight across it, using it as a short cut for the long curve of the road around it. Not rarely the lake is wholly or partly frozen in July, and as low a temperature as 30° Fahrenheit has been known on the

pass in August and in full sunshine.[1] The snow-storms, from which no season is exempt, are frightful in that region of fierce winds; the average annual snow-fall around the hospice amounts to over sixteen feet, and in winter the monks of the hospice must often go to the third and fourth story for the light of day. Although that is the height of the snow as it falls on the open ground, it is no indication of the immense quantities that drift with the wind and pile to incredible thickness in some parts of the neighbourhood: as much as a hundred feet of snow has been measured at points, where gullies and ravines were entirely filled up. When winter begins to weaken before the oncoming good season, short as this may be, the stupendous masses of snow slide over the rocks and precipitate in destructive avalanches, the remains of which the rays of a brief summer sun cannot melt, no matter how hot it blaze.

Considering, on the one hand, the rigour and length of the winter, the violence of the storms, the promptness with which the snow effaces every sign of road into the dreary uniformity of the white landscape; and, on the other, the fact that this pass has been, ever since history mentioned the region at all, a most important artery

[1] Saussure, chap. xlii., § 989.

in the international movement of people, it is not surprising that there should be provided on it a place of refuge for travellers, where food, lodging, and assistance can be found by those in need.

The foundation of the hospice has been generally attributed to St. Bernard, an Aostan prelate of the tenth century; St. Bernard cannot, however, claim a greater place, at most, than that of restorer. The hospice existed in Roman times, as the ruins on the pass yet show; the pass was then called the Mons Jovis. The hospice fell into decay during the first centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire, but, according to some authors, was rebuilt by Charlemagne after the defeat of Desiderius, the last king of the Longobards. At any rate, we find it mentioned in the document by which Lothair, King of Lorraine, in 859 ceded his holdings south of the Jura to Ludovic II., Emperor; in this document the pass is still called by the Latin name, Mons Jovis.

In the annals of the bishops of Lausanne, it is stated that Hartmannus, *elemosynarius* (*i.e. prévôt*) of the hospice was made bishop of Lausanne in 851.[1]

Saint Bernard comes into prominence about a century later. He was not a Valdostan, but a Ligu-

[1] Simlerius (*Vallesiæ*), lib. i., page 83.

rian of noble descent. His father, Richard, Count of Mentone, meant to have him marry a certain young lady, but the youth objected. Partly because of the feeling aroused by this incident, and partly because of a natural religious bent, the young scion of the house of Mentone fled and came to Aosta, where he was received by the archdeacon of the cathedral, Pierre d' Isère. Bernard entered upon his religious vocation under the paternal care and sympathy of Pierre, was soon made a canon, and when Pierre died, was called to succeed him. In this position, Bernard engaged in so intense a work of piety that his fame spread and his holiness soon began to be widely talked of.

About the middle of the tenth century, the upper regions of the valley of Aosta, and with them the pass of Mons Jovis, had been occupied by brigand bands of Saracens, which had become the terror of all travellers. Archdeacon Bernard seems to have organised a crusade against them and finally freed the mountains. The people soon wove a legend around this great event and depicted the saint in victorious battle with the devils; an old seal of the hospice also shows him holding Satan chained. The archdeacon, instead, was of practical mind, and restored the hospice on the pass and put it into the hands of Augustinian friars.

The hospice kept on, however, being known by the name of Mons Jovis (or Mont Joux, in French), and occasionally of St. Nicholas.[1] The name of St. Bernard does not appear coupled with the pass before the end of the twelfth century,[2] and the Augustinians in charge of the hospice for many centuries after that called themselves officially the Prévôté de Mont Joux.[3] The real part St. Bernard had in the making of the hospice that now honours his name was, therefore, that of giving a definite organisation and a regular administration to the institution, rather than of creating it—a vital matter, even so.

From the time of Bernard, the institution prospered: gifts were showered upon it from all sides; even from the far land of Britain came offerings, sent by Queen Eleanor and King Edward I. (1274).

[1] Vaccarone (*Vie*), page 67, note 1.

[2] Luitprand, lib. i., chap. 9 (vol. ii., part 1, page 231), speaking in the Xth century of Arnulf, says: . . . *per Hannibalis viam, quam Bardum dicunt, et Montem Jovis repedare disposuit.*—In two conveyances, of 1168 (*Mon. Historiæ Patriæ*, charta 540, page 582) and 1177 (*ibid.*, charta 565, page 885), the hospice is still called "Domus pauperum Montis Jovis"—"The hospice of Mons Jovis." The first document we could find in which the name St. Bernard is used, dates from 1181 (*Mon. Hist. Pat.*, charta 501, page 905). For some time afterward both names seem to have been used interchangeably or together (the hospice of St. Bernard of Mons Jovis).

[3] Aubert, page 261.

By the fourteenth century, the congregation of St. Bernard had grown to be one of the richest of all church organisations, which is saying much; it owned eighty-eight benefices of different kinds in Switzerland (Valais, Lausanne, Basel and Geneva), Italy (Aosta, Ivrea, Turin, Vercelli, Novara), and France (Besançon, Langres, Autun, Troyes). At the same time it had gained such reputation for generosity and self-sacrifice that between 1459 and 1512 three princes of the house of Savoy felt honoured to be chosen as its head. At that time it had also charge of the hospice of the Petit St. Bernard. These two passes were then the best highway between Italy and Western Europe, and the hospices were at the height of their glory.

The dukes of Savoy had the right of choosing the head of the "Prévôté de Mont Joux," as Martigny —the local seat of the Augustinian order—and the St. Bernard pass were, as permanently as any outlying districts could then belong to a state, part of the dominions of the house of Savoy. When, in 1564, lower Valais, with Martigny and the pass of the Grand St. Bernard, gained independence, the right of choice still remained with the dukes of Savoy, later kings of Sardinia; and this led to conflicts with the Valaisans, who did not see why their

late sovereign should still keep a meddling hand in their affairs. To settle the question, which had given rise to violence, the pope decided in 1753 that the canton Valais should acquire the right of choosing the head of the St. Bernard congregation, but gave the king all the congregation's holdings within his states as a compensation. So the St. Bernard community won independence, but lost most of its money. From that time it entered a period of decadence, further enhanced by the competition of railroads. Notwithstanding its diminished importance, it still ministers to about twenty thousand travellers every year, and if the poor wayfarer tends to decrease in numbers, the welcome clientele of the prosperous tourist is steadily on the increase.

Although stripped of its temporal goods, the congregation is still held in high esteem. All its members are canons, about forty in number. Their chief, the *prévôt*, is elected for life and depends directly on the Holy See, like a *bishop exempt;* he wears the mitre, the breast cross, the ring, and the purple belt; he is expected to stay at the hospice if his health allows, otherwise he may reside in Martigny. The *prieur*, elected for three years, must stay at the hospice all the year round and represents the prévôt in his absence.

The temporal affairs of the congregation are looked after by the *procurateur*, who has also charge of supplying stores for the winter; the church is taken care of by the *sacrestan*, who holds the keys of the treasury; the honours of the house are done by the *clavendier*, who receives the travellers and the voluntary offerings, which, if tourists, they are expected to make for the hospitality granted them—the poor are entertained and assisted free. There is also an *infirmier*, who cares for the rooms, the pharmacy, and any sick folk; a *bibliothècaire*, and a *gardelinge*, or keeper of the linen.

The calling of the canons of St. Bernard is toilsome and dangerous; there is little pleasure in it aside from the self-recompense of charity. It takes men of hard physique and of sterling soul to go out into blinding snow-storms, while the wind howls through the black gorges and the whole creation seems to throb in a paroxysm of distress—to go out and dare the enraged mountains with the solitary company of a faithful dog, the only cheerful bit of nature in that forsaken world—to go out because some poor fellow-being might be toiling up the weary way, might have lost his bearings, might be in peril. The man and the dog hunt for

the unfortunate, encourage and help him when he is found; sometimes they carry him bodily to the hospice; they give him food and recall strength and life; and this burdensome work of charity lasts through nine months of the year, made heavier and more painful by the unavoidable failures, by the biting sorrow of impotency—when the pious search leads to the discovery of a hopeless victim, and the slow train up the slopes of ice carries a dead body instead of a living being. Sometimes, too, in the sullen half-consciousness that seizes a man lost in the snow, preparing for him a passing as easy as sleep, the victim rebels, struggling against help, and striking those who are trying to shake him out of his fatal torpor. The best of all dogs of the hospice, a dog with a brilliant record as a life-saver, was thus killed a few years ago by a dazed traveller, who took him for a wild beast, while the good animal was trying to warm him up by licking him.

For this life of sacrifice there is no fulsome earthly prize: a little bit of social entertainment when tourists stop at the hospice during the ephemeral "good season"; the pleasure of some reading in the well-chosen library when duty does not call; a few avocations, like the tending of the meteorological observatory, or the collecting of

Roman antiquities for the small museum in the hospice—is about all the canons have to vary the uniformity of lives given up to a real service of religion and humanity.

Once in a while, comes some historical event to stir that sequestered little world in the mountains—the march of an army, the passing of a royal party; but they are rare happenings and becoming ever the rarer, the more the armies stay at home and royal parties travel by rail.

The last of such notable occasions was the passage of Napoleon the Great as First Consul, at the head of the French army in 1800. There was no stage road then over the pass, only a mule path, and taking a whole army over it with complete outfit of artillery was a feat worthy of ranking beside the crossing of Hannibal and his elephants over the Alps: Hannibal, however, had to leave most of his elephants behind, to mark with their huge carcasses his daring trail, while Napoleon brought all his guns and his cavalry safe to the plains of the Po and the victory of Marengo.

It took nine days for the French army to get over the bold range: its chief was received cordially and entertained by the canons of the hospice, while the guns and the carriages, taken to

pieces, were filing by on mule-back. Napoleon was so pleased with his reception that when the road over the Simplon Pass was begun, that very year, he planned to build a hospice on its top and give it to the St .Bernard congregation. His attention was distracted from this plan by mightier matters, when the road was finished in 1806; but the hospice was actually built in 1825–31, and given in charge to the St. Bernard canons, and they still run it, although the railway tunnel below the pass has now diverted most of the traffic from above.

The somewhat prematurely grateful canons showed their recognition of Napoleon's intent by interring in the church of the hospice, as in a fitting Pantheon, the body of one of his favourite generals, Desaix, who was killed in battle on the field of Marengo; a statue by Moitte was erected above the tomb by order of Napoleon. The "republic" of Valais, a Napoleonic parenthesis in the history of canton Valais, also expressed its gratitude to its "restorer," at that time Emperor of the French, by placing a tablet in a room of the St. Bernard hospice: the tablet, which was not removed in spite of the changing fortune of Napoleon, bears the following inscription:

Napoleoni primo Francorum Imperatori semper
augusto
Rei publicæ Valesianæ Restauratori semper optimo
Ægyptiaco bis Italico semper invicto
In Monte Jovis et Sempronii semper memorando
Respublica Valesiæ II Decembris

Anno MDCCCIV

To Napoleon First, Emperor of the French,
always august,
Restorer of the Valaisan Republic,
ever excelling,
From Egypt to Italy
always unconquered,
On Mons Jovis and Simplon
to be ever remembered,
The Republic of Valais
The second of December
In the year 1804

It stays there to commemorate a man who was indeed a real benefactor of Valais, although the style of their tribute is emphatically adulatory for a republic, especially for one that in 1810 became part of the French Empire and hastened to rebel against its "restaurator" and to "restore" the canton in inverse order, as soon as the allied troops, by crossing the Rhine, gave sign that Napoleon's hour had struck.

Napoleon was a man of plain habits and great

simplicity, particularly when on a campaign; in his passage of the St. Bernard, he had several times occasion to impress the rude mountaineers with those qualities. The story is told[1] of the day when he climbed toward the hospice, astride of a mule, guided by a young peasant. The First Consul had nothing in his dress that revealed his rank, and he felt, probably for lack of other concern, in a talkative mood; the peasant, on the other hand, had worries, and, quite unawed by the unpresumptuous presence beside him, was willing to give vent to them. So the conversation went on briskly: Napoleon questioned the young man kindly about his life, his people, his work, and the latter replied readily to the courteous and interested officer. By the time they had reached the hospice, the young man had had a chance to tell his companion that he was in love, that he had a hard time, and that if he only could buy a little piece of land, etc., etc. The surprise of the peasant was not small, when, sometime later, he received the announcement that Napoleon himself, the most powerful man in the world of that day, had not forgotten the woes of his plaintive guide, and gave him the money necessary to buy the field and the house that were wanted for the upbuilding of his happi-

[1] Thiers, lib. iv. (Marengo), vol. i., page 123.

ness. The peasant lived long after the fate of his stormy donor had been sealed, to tell the tale of his gratitude.

The pass of the Petit St. Bernard (7178 ft.) is on the southern side of the valley of Aosta. The road that leads to it is the same as that of the upper valley of Aosta as far as Pré St. Didier, whence it turns to the left toward the magnificent plateau of La Thuile, green with pastures and forests, crowned by the immense white fields of the Ruitor glacier and the sharp peaks of the Assaly (10,413). After La Thuile, with many a detour, the road reaches the pass, on its way up leaping a deep and savage gorge, along which the remains of crumbled bridges tell the story of human efforts to span the chasm through different ages.

The Petit St. Bernard, like the Grand St. Bernard, was one of the passes used by the Romans, who called it Alpis Graia; the Roman ruins on it are almost as important as those of the higher pass to the north. But although as old as its namesake, the Petit St. Bernard cannot boast such a sensational history, probably because it is actually of minor importance as a highway of communication between France and Italy, owing to the proximity of the Mont Cenis and the Mont Genève. The

best that the Petit St. Bernard can remember in the way of exciting events is the passing of some invading armies of Frenchmen, and the brilliant pageant of the dukes of Savoy, coming once in a while from their capital in Chambéry to Aosta, with large following of knights, to preside over the court of justice, receive the oath of fealty from vassals, and keep an eye on the affairs of that quarter in general—too independent a region to be altogether trusted to itself. Anything from an historical standpoint so sensational as the passing of Charlemagne[1] or Napoleon, never fell to the lot of the Petit St. Bernard. True, some historian, by means of an analytical scanning of documents, forced Hannibal through the Tarantaise over it; but since there are as many terrene claimants for the celebrated footsteps of the Punic general and his elephants as for the birthplace of Columbus, we may let the matter rest, temporarily. Cæsar used it freely, but he seems to consider it in such a matter-of-course way that he never gives it particular mention.

The Romans had had a hospice on the Petit St. Bernard; the archdeacon Bernard, in his turn,

[1] According to some authorities, Charlemagne did not cross either St. Bernard, but sent his father-in-law over the Gd. St. Bernard with part of his army.

rebuilt the destroyed refuge, and traces of the primitive tenth-century buildings he erected are still to be seen. During the Middle Ages it was known as the Hospice and Pass of Mont Jouvet. As late as the eighteenth century, it was in charge of the canons of the Grand St. Bernard; in that century, however, it passed under the administration of the Order of St. Maurice and Lazarus, which still keeps it up. It is a simpler establishment than that on the Grand St. Bernard; the pass is lower, has a good road, is not so cold, nor so badly beaten by storms, and offers no such dangers in winter. Moreover, travellers are always fewer—practically none in winter,—and there is felt no need of dogs, of hunts for the storm-disabled, or of a hospital.

There is only one *religieux* in charge of the hospice, with a few servants to tend the menial tasks of housekeeping. He comes from the diocese of Aosta, has lived on the pass since 1859, and clings to his hermitage and its difficult conditions, although the sun of his life be setting and the shades of twilight hang over him. We have already mentioned him, the hospitable Abbot Chanoux, to whose untiring work is due the valuable botanical garden of the pass, in his honour called *La Chanousia*. Whoever has stayed at the

hospice will recall as one of the pleasantest memories of his travels, the hours spent chatting with the serene old abbot, before the great log-fire, which crackled cheerily, while the stars without shone clear through the night air, sharp and still.

CHAPTER V

CONCERNING GLACIERS AND MOUNTAINEERING

A GLACIER is somewhat improperly described when it is called a "mass of ice." Ice is commonly understood to be the result of the clear freezing of water into a transparent solid body, but glacier ice is never transparent. The reason for this is that glacier ice is not the result of freezing water, but is compressed and solidified snow; consequently, glacier ice is always coarse and granular, even though it be as hard and compact as rock. In great masses it takes a shivery, bluish hue, seen to best advantage by peering into a crevasse. The surface of the glacier, exposed to the action of the atmosphere and the sun's rays, melts at times at some points, freezes over again, and so may occasion the presence of real ice; but these external agencies do not affect the great mass of the glacier.

Accordingly, what happens on the surface—

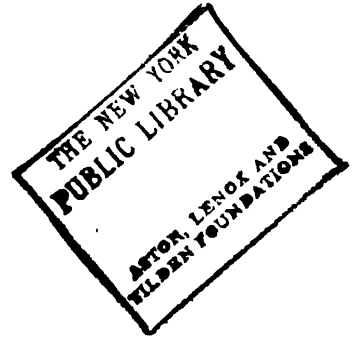
rain and snow-fall, changes of temperature, etc.—has no bearing upon the formation and maintenance of the glacier; that has its birthplace and source of supply in the vast plateaus of eternal snow—the so-called *nevé* or *firn*—to be found in the highest regions of the mountains. Very seldom are such feeders to be met with in the Alps under twelve thousand feet above sea-level, and consequently Alpine mountain ranges that do not reach to such a height have no glaciers at all, or, at most, only small, so-called *hanging glaciers* (snow pockets perpetuating themselves in cold spots), while the higher not only have many glaciers, but also send them a long distance below the line of persistent snows and even below the line of tree vegetation,—glaciers thrusting their *snouts* among spruce forests, at four or five thousand feet above sea-level are not uncommon.

If glaciers are fed from above, it is evident that they must have some way of carrying down their feed, as it were. This they do, in fact, by the exceedingly slow, but incessant motion down the ravines in which they lie. When the extreme edge reaches the warm regions, the ice melts away into a torrent, but a continuous supply of new ice strata is brought to the front without rest; the snows from the *firn* high in the rear make their

The Grande Sassière from the Glacier of Vaudet

(*Notice stratification of ice in the Glacier*)

From a photograph by Signor Giovanni Bobba of Turin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way, little by little, to the front below, and then dissolve. Any object left on a glacier, or any victim swallowed by the pitiless maw of a crevasse, is sure to come to light some day, roughly laid out on the débris at the end of the glacier.

The progress of this downward march is necessarily very slow, since the ice moves, not as a liquid mass, but as a plastic solid body, somewhat like a current of lava. A ladder left by De Saussure on the Glacier du Géant in 1788 was picked up at the Montenvers, near the bottom of the Mer de Glace, in 1832; in those forty-four years it had covered a distance of about three miles and a half,[1] at an average speed of three hundred feet a year. There are people who hope thus to recover the body of the young Lord Douglas who perished in the first successful ascent of the Matterhorn, but whose body could not be found with those of the other victims on the Matterhorn glacier; they start, however, from the supposition that Lord Douglas may have disappeared in a crevasse of the glacier, and is not resting yet on some rocky ledge, alone, out of man's reach, his tomb the mountain and God's heaven its silent guard.

The movement of glaciers varies greatly, not

[1] Forbes, pp. xxi. and 141.

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only in different glaciers, according to their mass and their inclination and the nature of their rocky bed, but in the same glacier. The rates of the Mer de Glace, for instance, vary according to localities between two hundred and nine hundred feet a year. As soon as the glacier in its flow meets with a steep hill or a smooth course, it starts forward, only to be checked and held back when the slope is gentler or the bottom rougher or the passage narrower; further, the movement of the sides is slower than the middle, since the friction of the side walls against the valley is stronger. As the different parts of a glacier move at different speeds, it is quite clear that they cannot move together; hence the glacier cracks, making *crevasses*, which are sometimes as broad, as long and deep as chasms, and sometimes mere fissures. Crevasses open in the glaciers at any moment, and grow in size, but their growth is very gradual and offers no danger whatever to people walking over the glacier.

If in its forward movement the glacier reaches a place where the rock-bed suddenly drops, as most valley bottoms are likely to do somewhere in their length, it follows the sharp change of inclination as best it can—which generally means that it breaks in two and the parts are connected

by a wild tumble of ice débris, piled up in strangest shapes, balanced in most precarious positions, chopped in all directions. This is what is termed an *ice fall*, and when it is of such specially bad nature that the débris forms all sorts of queer needles and towers and teeth and projections, they are styled *séracs*. Séracs are also produced alongside the glacier—where it strikes some rocky obstacle in its course, or wherever the great pressure of the ice mass, because of some invincible resistance, crushes and shatters itself; where the rock-bed is ample and the glacier flows easily, one does not find séracs. Toward the edges, where the wall is steep, the ice surface in immediate contact with the rock melts away because of the radiation from it, and there forms a wide gap between ice and rock, which is called a *bergschrund*.

A glacier always carries along an immense amount of stone material, which falls upon it in *lavines* from the crumbling sides of the rocky ledges; this it discharges either toward the sides or toward the snout, slowly building around itself a wall of débris, scientifically called the *moraine*—the name scientists first heard given it by the peasants of Chamonix.[1] A moraine is *lateral* or

[1] Saussure, vol. i., page 455, § 536, and vol. iii., page 486 note, § 1722.

frontal, according to its position with respect to the glacier. Since a moraine is approximately as high as the glacier that originated it, if we see a moraine rising high above a glacier, we can infer that the glacier has diminished in size; if lower than the glacier, the latter has been growing.

Glaciers are never fixed quantities: they periodically extend and withdraw, according to whether much or little snow falls on the firn that feeds them. At present most glaciers in the Alps are shrinking; it is probable, however, that a period of growth might soon come, owing to the fact that the years 1907–'08–'09 have been very rich in snow-falls. At any rate, there is no need of fearing for their existence, even though the traveller has now farther to go to find them.

Mountaineers are well aware of this phenomenon and they even assign a definite length to the periods—seven years, the time forewarned by the well-favoured and the lean kine of Pharaoh's dream.[1] The fact that periods occur is true, but their assigned length is not: this is altogether indefinite.

The Glacier de la Brenva, near Courmayeur, ends now at some distance from the left bank of the Dora; it has been withdrawing ever since 1855,

[1] Saussure, vol. i., page 463, § 540.

when it bridged the torrent to the right bank.[1] In 1818 it had reached the other side of the valley and even climbed up on it to the point of destroying the path and the chapel of Nôtre Dame de la Guerison,[2] forging ahead like a steam drill, its snout armed with hard granite splinters and sand imbedded in the ice; the whole boring outfit was visible and was studied in the middle of the nineteenth century.[3] That was the period of greatest growth for the Brenva; in 1767 it was much shorter[4]; it had spurts of development in 1843–5,[5] following years of heavy snow-falls, but it never again attained its previous grandeur. During the last few years the Brenva has shown signs of fresh growth.

The story of the Brenva is better known because it can be followed in historical documents; but all other glaciers have relatively the same record. In the years about 1777, while the glacier of Grindelwald—by which may be meant either the Ober or the Unter Grindelwald, or both—had shrunk, others in the Finsteraarhorn group had expanded, invaded some passes between the

[1] Forbes, page 29.
[2] Hall, *Patchwork*, i., 108 (*ex* Forbes, page 33).
[3] Forbes, page 30.
[4] See engraving of it in Saussure, vol. ii., plate iii.
[5] Forbes, 34.

Bernese Oberland and Valais, and even destroyed a village (St. Petronelle)[1]; the same glacier of Grindelwald had twenty years earlier invaded pasture land and chased out the shepherds.[2]

The movements of glaciers are a matter of deep concern with the inhabitants of Val d' Aosta, as well as of any other Alpine valley, because thereby glaciers dangerously interfere with the natural flow of waters and slowly but steadily, as if enjoying in advance the grim delight of destruction, build great catastrophes. The Brenva has more than once thrown its cold, white body across the current of the Dora, but fortunately for the valley, the stream is powerful enough to bore through the ice or dig its exit through the moraine. The lake of Combal was formed by an obstruction of the torrent, but it is safely held in by the mass of the moraine, and no danger lurks in that quarter; but the glacier and the lake of the Ruitor have a sinister fame in the valley.

The Ruitor (11,437 ft.) is a peak between the valley of the Petit St. Bernard and Val Grisanche; toward the first of these valleys it is covered by one of the largest glaciers of the whole Val d' Aosta. The glacier ends in a little ravine, through which

[1] *Encyclopédie* (Suppl.), article *Glaciers*.
[2] *Encyclopédie*, article *Glaciers*.

there flows a creek with a small pond in it, rather pompously called a lake. When the glacier was in a period of growth in 1860, it dammed the ravine, and the creek formed a real lake of considerable size and great depth (over 150 feet), supported entirely by the ice wall. The spectacle of the blue ice cliffs, rising straight from the green waters, and of the small icebergs breaking off into the lake was described by contemporaries as entrancing.[1]

This wonderful sight, oft-repeated, has warned of ever-impending calamity for the valley. Several times in the course of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the fairy lake of the Ruitor has borne down, with the immense weight of its waters, the walls of its crystal cloister, weakened by sunshine, and disappeared at a stroke, carrying the torn ends of the glacier, uprooting forests, and deporting houses along its way, levelling villages, and bringing destruction to the very gates of Aosta.[2]

The peasants of the valley, helpless before such fury, full of repentance for the moment, used to make a pilgrimage every spring to the little chapel of St. Margherita by the lake, and pray that the

[1] Aubert, page 41.
[2] Baretti.

mercy of Divine Providence might spare them for the coming year. Grace was not always granted them, but they kept up the practice faithfully until not many years ago, when, seeing that the glacier had retired and the dreaded lake become a mud-hole, they deemed it no longer necessary to ask for what Nature had evidently granted. The chapel is there yet, however, and ready for further use, should the glacier again give signs of trouble.

The pilgrimage to the Ruitor lake is, according to a tradition current in the valley, a very ancient custom, and the hypothesis has been expressed that it might be a Christian adaptation of a pagan ceremony long ante-dating it.[1] Interesting it is to notice that a similar religious practice is to be found in the Cévennes (Lozères) in France—though the object in this latter case is not an unruly glacier—traceable to the intervention of Bishop Hilarius, who was desirous of giving a decent turn to a pagan custom that had degenerated into a debauching carouse.[2]

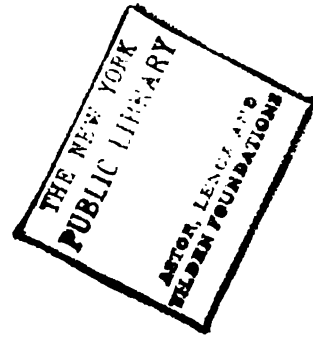
The glaciers that still fringe the high points of Val d' Aosta are mere tatters, compared with the

[1] Aubert, page 42.

[2] Gregory of Tours.

Lake and Glacier of the Ruitor (present condition). ***Peaks of the Assaly***

From a photograph by Signor Origoni of Milan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immense mass of ice that covered the whole valley in the glacial era. The glacier of that time, beginning at the range of Mont Blanc, extended throughout the main valley, connecting with the smaller glaciers filling the side valleys, and finally jutted out into the plains of Ivrea. Here the prehistoric glacier left at the same time the evident proofs of its colossal proportions, and the most impressive monument of glacial power, in the moraines that surround the Ivrean plain on all sides and make a gigantic amphitheatre. The lateral moraine on the eastern side of the amphitheatre is a ridge, the outline of which, almost perfectly straight, gently and regularly inclines toward the plains—a veritable class model for the study of glacial deposit, so ideally built up it is!

It is about thirteen miles long, and at its highest point, where it rests against the Colma di Mombarone, the first line of Valdostan mountains, it has an elevation of two thousand feet above the level of the plains below. Toward its lower end, this moraine, called La Serra, joins the frontal moraine, which has a length of approximately eleven miles and is formed of two arches, one beside the other, as if the glacier had, toward its end, divided into two streams. This division is also proved by the presence of an incidental or middle

moraine, about two miles long, to be found near Caravino, where the ends of the two frontal arches meet. The lateral moraine on the west, much more irregular, is about six miles long and sixteen hundred feet high!

From the size of the moraines and the morenic amphitheatre, we may gather that the Val d'Aosta glacier covered a distance of more than eighty miles, projected into the Po plains for at least sixteen miles, covering no fewer than one hundred and forty square miles of the flat land, upon which it lay with the tremendous thickness of between two and three thousand feet. It is no wonder that enormous erratic blocks are now to be met with in the very middle of the rich, fine loam of the valley of the Po, and that some such material, brought in ages past from the Mont Blanc, has been used in building houses there.

Assuming for the great glacier an average speed of three hundred feet a year, it must have taken fully a dozen centuries for these giant boulders to travel from the spot where they broke loose from the mountain-side to that where they were finally laid at rest; but the glacier had the power and surely did not lack the time. Now the huge moraines, the boulders, and a few pretty little lakes among the environs of Ivrea, are all

that is left of the formidable ice-stream; and out of the long-gone fierceness of nature there smiles a charming setting for towns and villages.

In the preceding chapters we have often spoken of dangers of the mountains, and mentioned catastrophes that have overtaken, and overtake, climbers. Since any one who comes near the Alps always feels more or less tempted to clamber up their slopes, it might be *à propos* here briefly to analyse the perils of mountaineering, according to the lessons of our experience and that of others.

Mountain-climbing, restricted to well-marked paths, offers no special difficulty, although, in a more limited sense, some of the considerations that follow might apply to this form also. Difficulties begin when the climber leaves the path and takes to rocks or a glacier.

Glaciers and rocks may be dangerous, but are not necessarily so—that is to say, danger is always present there, but it does not need to affect any climber unless he chooses that it shall. In other words, glaciers and rocks are dangerous only in as far as the explorer makes them so; otherwise their dangers are easily avoided. One's situation on a glacier or a rock is very much like that of a man in city streets. No one will deny that

crossing a street on which there run in two different directions and with different speeds, four columns of vehicles of diverse type—automobiles, carriages, trucks—is a dangerous enterprise. If the citizen stop suddenly in the middle, he may easily be run over and killed or injured; still, there is no need of his stopping, and the proper amount of precaution will take him safely over.

So it is with the man in the high mountains: there are risky passages he has to make, and he might drop into a crevasse or over a precipice, but he does not need to do so, if he takes proper precautions. Dangers are not dangerous unless one puts oneself into them! There are very few Alpine accidents in which the cause of the disaster cannot be traced to some serious imprudence on the part of a climber. There is only one form of danger that is very real and absolutely beyond the will of man—the fall of rocks, a frequent occurrence among Alpine summits, which are constantly being disintegrated by frosts and thaws.

By fall of rock we do not necessarily mean avalanches or lavines, which are often avoidable, but the fall of loose stones that come flying down the side of the mountain and leap and bound and burst into splinters as if they were explosive shells.

When the rocky wall is very steep and offers bad footing, and the stones fall with great noise, yet with such speed as to be almost invisible, it is impossible to dodge, and a man's fate hangs upon a chance. Such an accident cost the life of a brave Alpinist, one Signor Poggi of Milan, in his escalade of the Aiguille Noire de Pétéret in the Mont Blanc group. At the same time, the cases of climbers killed or wounded by falling stones are so rare that it is hardly worth while to take this danger into account, beyond following the cautious rule of avoiding as much as is feasible all places known as regular channels for the travel of such missiles; surely it is not to be compared proportionately with the number of deaths due to automobile accidents!

Aside from this, presupposing a body physically strong enough to stand the strain of long marches, a brain free from vertigo, a reasonable amount of courage and cool-headedness in fronting the unknown and the unexpected, there is nothing to be feared in the Alps, even in so-called high Alpinism, provided the climber makes use of good guides. Only the thoroughly experienced and the strongest explorers can get along with no guides, without taking serious chances. Furthermore, no man should venture on a difficult climb

before well knowing what physical powers he has at his disposal; many an accident, apparently caused by an unavoidable slip, has been in reality due to the fact that a climber was worn out and had become unsteady on his legs.

Bad weather may become a danger, and so may mountain sickness, against which man is as helpless as against sea-sickness; but both can be avoided by turning and fleeing at the first intimations. A mountaineer must not be afraid to give up when circumstances are against him. A guide who lives in the mountains and knows the freakish temper of their weather, is invaluable in helping to determine the advisability of retreat.

In walking over a glacier it is always prudent to sound the surface with a pick and to avoid with care passing through or under séracs—through, because their broken surface makes progress tardy and wearisome; under, because séracs are likely to fall at any moment; they have fallen on even so slight a disturbance as the air vibration caused by voices, and have, on the instant, become avalanches. Crevasses and bergschrunds may be crossed over snow-bridges; steep ice or rock walls may be climbed over snow crust; narrow rock-ledges may be passed over snow cornices, but here also is essential the advice of an experi-

enced guide, whose practised eye can judge at once whether the frail support is solid enough.

In conclusion, to those who long for the emotions of the great ascents, we should say: be sure of your health; train your body and your brain; get good guides, and then go ahead—there is no emotion that surpasses the zest of the climb and the joy of the conquest.

Climbs in the Pennine Alps are generally mixed—that is, partly over rock and partly over glacier. As a rule, there is not much to choose, and the climber has to change from one to the other as obstacles bid. Sometimes it happens that it is possible to go some distance, either by rock or ice or snow. Some people prefer the rock, as it seems at first safer to stay on solid ground; but, as a rule, one finds after a while that glaciers and hard snow-banks afford a much more direct and comfortable way—unless too many steps must be cut.

Climbers wear heavy, hob-nailed boots and carry a pick and ropes. The hob-nails, whatever their shape may be—and tastes vary—are a necessity; so is a pick; this will help cut steps in ice, in holding fast to slippery surfaces, and can often stop the downward flight of one who loses

his footing. As for the ropes, opinions are somewhat divided: on glaciers they are always useful; occasionally, when some member of a party has disappeared through the surface snow, they have saved him from a bad tumble—possibly a mortal one—into a crevasse, which is, at best, a most inhospitable place. If the rope is held well stretched between the climbers, it is easy with the help of the pick for any one to hold up a man who slips out of sight—or even two—and to fish him out of trouble. Useful the rope may be on easy rocks—that is, rocks not too steep, and with good footing and holding places—although keeping it taut is inconvenient in such irregular proceeding; but on bad rocks—that is, rock which is very steep and slippery, with bad footings or holdings, or coated with ice—a rope may give a certain sense of connection with fellow-beings, but, worse than useless, it is sometimes dangerous, under such conditions, because it is next to impossible for any one to stop a falling man, and the falling man, instead of going alone to his fate, will drag along all his companions. But whether it is used on all occasions or not, a rope is one of the best friends of the climber.

The rate of progress in the mountains varies

greatly with the difficulty of the route, but is never rapid. It is generally reckoned that every succeeding hour, walking over ordinary paths, finds the traveller about a thousand feet higher in level. Such a rate can never be kept up on pathless heights: the nearest one can get to it is by scaling a snow bank, no matter how steep (even 40°–50°), that is just soft enough to kick steps in with a boot without recourse to the pick, or on easy rock, where a speed of seven to eight hundred feet an hour may be reached. Bad rock, however, or steep ice requiring step-cutting keeps the climber at hard work and in keen suspense much longer; then, a rate of two hundred feet an hour may be considered satisfactory. In the first climb of the Dent Blanche, it took ten hours and forty-five minutes to go the last twenty-four hundred feet.[1] Nor is descent any faster or any easier; coming down the ice-coated slope of the Col Dolent, Whymper's party had to toil seven hours to lower themselves twelve hundred feet[2]: coming down is, as a rule, the worst part of the climb!

The best season for climbing is generally late in summer, the second half of August and the first

[1] Whymper, page 264.
[2] Whymper, pp. 335–339.

half of September, when the weather is good, and yet the temperature is already colder and the snow freezes easily. Winter climbing has some advantages, because snow then solidifies promptly, fills crevasses and opens the way; but the very low temperatures, the frequent storms, the short days, are formidable hindrances. The worst time to climb is the late spring, when all the upper Alpine world seems in a state of undoing; snow melts and slides in great avalanches, stones fall in tremendous lavines, where the grip of the ice loosens. When nature is in uproar, man would better stay by himself and keep very still.

Part II—Vallis Augustana

CHAPTER I

THE GRIP OF ROME

THE Roman ruins of Val d' Aosta are from an historical point of view among the most important extant, ranking next only to those of Rome and Pompei for number, size, and state of preservation. Perhaps one ought to say that they rank not *next*, but *by the side of* those of Rome and Pompei, as each group has a peculiar distinction of its own. If Pompei offers an unsurpassed picture of every-day life in the golden age of Rome, and Rome itself preserves in its imposing remains the superb seal of imperial extravagance, the valley of Aosta reveals still another moment and another phase of Roman civilisation: its monuments belong exclusively either to the republican or to the early Augustan era—an age that has left scanty traces of its building activities—and are not of a decorative, but of a thoroughly practical nature—roads, bridges, rock-cuts, mines, water plants, city gates and walls.

Pompei shows us the Romans at home; Rome—or what is left of it—shows them rather in public functions and at play, in festivals religious and political; Aosta gives us the Romans at work. While in Rome the spendthriftiness of the later emperors has destroyed most of the buildings of the earlier Rome that strove for success and greatness, Pompei and Aosta have this in common, that their buildings had no superposition or juxtaposition of later times—Pompei, through a natural accident, and Aosta, probably because the works there were so well done and answered their purpose so ably that nothing more was needed for centuries; moreover, that was no place for shows.

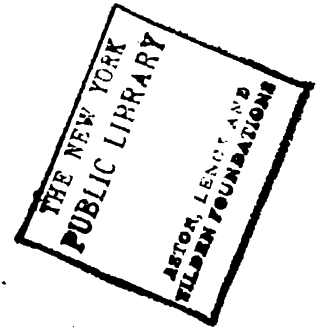
Incidentally, we may add that the Roman ruins of Val d'Aosta from an artistic point of view will be found superior both to those of the Eternal City and those of the Dead City, thanks to their impressive natural setting, at the foot of lofty mountains, by the side of foaming torrents, with the far background of high peaks and glaciers sparkling in the sun.

The fact may seem surprising at first, that such a remote mountainous district should have been endowed with so many lasting monuments. It is, however, easily explained by the history of the

Le Pailleron, Watch Tower of Roman Walls of Aosta

A Silver Coin of the Republic, minted by C. Piso

From treasure-trove, Ivrea. (Natural size; owned by the author)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valley, the only wonder being that so much should have been left, after twenty centuries of changing fortune, while in so many other places practically every trace of Roman times was completely effaced.

We have no notice of the valley of Aosta before it came into contact with the Roman republic: it was then inhabited by a Celtic population, called Salassi. Legends current in the valley itself and recounted by its most devoted and loyal historian,[1] have it that the Salassi themselves were a chosen and powerful people, whose founder was no other than Hercules himself, who is credited with having dared the crossing of the Alps, first of all men.[2] One of Hercules's chiefs, by name Statiel, had a son called Cordelus, and this man it was who settled in the valley of Aosta and built the great city of Cordelia, the capital of the powerful nation of the Salassi. The Aosta historian goes so far in his belief of the legend, as to state that Cordelia was in the neighbourhood of St. Martin de Corléans,[3] or near Aimaville, or, even more likely, near Pré St. Didier, as witnesses a spot there called "Piano di Cordelos." However it be, we let the matter rest at that and keep to

[1] De Tillet.
[2] Pliny, iii., 17; Cornelius Nepos, *Hannibal*, 3–4 (page 96).
[3] Near Aosta.

the safer ground of historical documents, only noticing that this grafting of Greek mythology on Gallic tradition looks rather suspicious.

The sole monument that the Salassi can claim for their own in the valley, is the cromlech on the plateau of the Petit St. Bernard, in itself a very remarkable ruin because of its great size—the diameters of its elliptical contour being two hundred eighty and two hundred forty feet—and the number of its stones, forty-six, but three or four wanting to complete the ellipse; and because it is one of only three similar ruins existing in Italy. It can hardly be taken for the ruins of a city, and, strangely enough, the local tradition has repudiated this solitary sign of a former national life by attributing it to Hannibal, who, according to the lore of the valley, sat there, all his generals facing him (presumably each man with his back to a stone, or astride of it), and held council.

After the second Punic War and Hannibal's adventures in Italy, which so deeply stirred the Gallic tribes of Northern Italy, the Salassi were quiet for a time.[1] The Romans, both from direct experience and from observation of routes followed by invaders of the Italian peninsula, knew that

[1] Dion Cassius, fragm. 79 (vol. i., page 40=fragm. 74 of other editions); Strabo, chap. 6, § 7 (vol i., page 322).

the passes over the Alps in the Salassi country were among the best leading into Helvetia and Transalpine Gaul, and very early began attempts to bring them into their possession; by the end of the second century before Christ, they had already occupied all Provence to the Lake of Geneva, and the control of the passes into the acquired regions was becoming a military necessity.

The first attempt against the Salassi was made by Appius Claudius Pulcher in 141 B.C.[1]; but the incautious consul let himself be surprised in the narrow mountain defiles and was defeated with the loss of five or ten thousand men.[2] He gathered troops again and made at once a second attack, which was more successful, as it led to the slaughter of five thousand enemies.[3] The Romans seized the occasion to enter into a treaty with the Salassi, by which the latter allowed the former to build a military road through the valley and over the passes of Alpis Graia and Mons Jovis (or *in summo Pennino*); also allowed the establishment of Roman military posts for the guarding of the road and, possibly, making *bonne*

[1] Dion Cassius (*loc. cit.*).

[2] P. Orosius, lib. v., chap. 4 (page 925); J. Obsequens, 80. This difference in number slain is due to the different readings of two codices of Orosius.

[3] P. Orosius, *loc. cit.* Livy, Epitome of book 53.

mine à mauvais jeu, accepted the burden of keeping the road in order.[1]

The conquered Salassi were, however, far from being tamed; with the excuse of their works around gold mines, they diverted streams from where the Roman soldiers needed them; the care of the road gave occasional chances for rolling showers of stone on passing Roman columns and from their valley they swooped down upon the inhabitants of the plains, who were under Roman rule, raiding like free marauders. This turbulence brought the Roman power a step nearer; in 98 B.C. Eporedia (now Ivrea) was founded, at the opening of the valley, and a strong military garrison was stationed there for emergencies.[2] In order to justify this measure, the Senate took the precaution of being advised so to act by the Sibylline books.[3]

The appearance of the camel's nose at the door of their tent seems to have kept the Salassi quiet

[1] Promis, page 15–16. Proofs that such agreement was entered into do not exist: it is, however, a very plausible surmise of Promis, by which alone can one explain how the road and the bridges were already in existence a hundred years before the actual occupation of the valley by the Romans. These roads probably belong to the constructive activities developed by C. Gracchus (Plutarch, *C. Gracchus*, 7, vol. iv., pages 660–661).

[2] Velleius Paterculus, i., 15 (page 16).

[3] Pliny, iii., 17.

for almost a century; which, however, did not keep the camel from getting in altogether in due time. A rebellion of the Salassi, mentioned as occurring in 32 B.C., ended in a victory of Valerius Messala[1]; but, it appears, since Messala was then warring in Illyricum, that the Salassi in question were a Celtic tribe of the Balkanic region.

At any rate, the Valdostan Salassi became very restless as soon as the disorder caused by the civil wars made them think that the power of Rome was weakening. They grew in audacity to the point of imposing a toll on Roman soldiers going through the valley,[2] and robbing one general—either Cæsar or Augustus—of his military treasure.[3] A large number of silver coins, found in 1856 in a cave near Allain, off the Grand St. Bernard road, is supposed to have been part of this treasure.[4]

Finally, 23 B.C., the Romans decided to put an end to this state of affairs, which was becoming

[1] Dion Cassius, xlix., 38 (vol. ii., page 391).

[2] Appianus, Alex., *De Rebus Illyricis*, 17 (vol. ii., page 222). The fact that also Appianus speaks of Salassi in connection with Illyrian peoples and in his Illyrian wars seems to confirm the opinion expressed above. In this particular case the Alpine Salassi would be out of question; but they had offences enough to answer for.

[3] Strabo, *loc. cit.*

[4] Promis, page 17.

plainly obnoxious. It is evident that they did not force their supremacy into the fastnesses of the heavily wooded valley without serious political motives. The mineral resources of a district remote and difficult of access would hardly have tempted the conquerors of kingdoms and nations into the dangerous task of subduing a fierce and independent population of mountaineers. After the conquest of Helvetia and of Gaul, the valley of Aosta was no longer an unknown and insignificant corner of the earth; it had promptly become the most direct highway between Italy and the northern dominions of the Republic. As the Roman power grew and strengthened itself beyond the Alps, not soldiers alone, but long trains of merchandise and large numbers of travellers went through the great valley and over the two passes, later the Great and the Little St. Bernard. A line of communication of such importance for empire had necessarily to come under absolute control.

A. Terentius Varro Murena took charge of the enterprise,[1] while Augustus and other generals were at the same time attacking at different points the populations occupying the whole chain of the

[1] Dion Cassius, xlix., 38 (*loc. cit.*); Strabo, *loc. cit.*; Livy, Epitome of book 135; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 20–21.

Alps." The work was thorough this time, even though the means to the end were not at all honest. Varro proceeded up the valley with his troops, as if he were bound on a foreign expedition, giving no sign of hostility; then, all of a sudden, he had the villages of the unsuspecting Salassi occupied by his soldiers and all the able-bodied men he could lay hands on captured unawares. As soon as Varro had so rid himself of the dangerous part of the population—the men capable of bearing arms—the rest was easy. No fewer than thirty-six thousand men, women, and children were taken to Eporedia and sold at auction as slaves, on condition that the purchasers should not free them within twenty years; eight thousand young men were forced into military service in the Roman legions; sixty-three hundred were killed, evidently in an attempt at resistance.

Although through such radical proceedings, the Salassi ceased to be, as a political factor in the valley, they were not wholly exterminated, as some authors state.[1] It is quite likely that some of them succeeded in escaping the dire fate of their compatriots and retired to the higher and wider regions of the mountains; ethnologists have even tried to see in such an event the reason for

[1] Strabo, *loc. cit.* (page 323).

the diversity of appearance between the inhabitants of the high valleys and those of the lower valleys of that district—a diversity all in favour of the highlanders.

It is certain that some of the Salassi, either because they were friendly to the invaders, or because of some special good fortune, were left in their places and mingled with the Roman colonists to whom the land was allotted. This was recently proved by the discovery in 1893 in Aosta under the tower of Bramafam, of a tablet[1] that the "Salassi, inhabitants, organised as colonists," put up to Augustus their patron, in the eleventh year of his consulate and the eighth of his imperial dignity—that is, in 23 B.C., or three years after Varro's coup.

Once the Romans were in the valley, they went to work with the rapidity and on the magnificent scale that characterised them. The lands that the dispersed Salassi had so unwillingly left were divided among the veterans and other Roman colonists. It would seem that when the Romans opened up a conquered district for colonisation,

[1] Giacosa, page 13. The inscription is as follows:
Imperatori Cæsari, Divi filio Augusto, Consuli XI, Imperatori VIII, Tribunicia potestate, Salassi Incolæ, Qui Initio Se, In Colonos Constituerunt, Patrono.

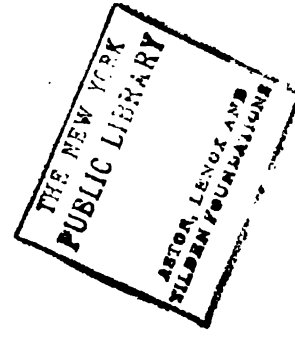
much the same thing happened as when the United States government throws open for settlement the lands of Indian reservations. People from all over Italy came to take out claims and start in the new country. A curious inscription found on a bridge that will be later described, mentions the names of two wealthy men of Padua, who had farms in the valley of Aosta soon after the clearing up of the region; which apparently proves that men from afar bought land and made their homes in that fair valley of the Pennine Alps. The road system was perfected; the highway over the Grand St. Bernard, in particular, was made easy and accessible to large bodies of troops[1]; road houses and hospices on the passes were built, where travellers could find refuge in storms and rest at all times.

On the spot where there had for some time been a Roman encampment, and where Varro had stopped with his men, near the confluence of the Dora and the Buthier, the Romans proceeded to erect a permanent city, which in honour of Augustus they called Augusta Prætoria. So permanent indeed was the type of construction, that the

[1] Cæcina crossed it in 30 A.D., with 30,000 soldiers (Tacitus, *Histor.*, i., 61 and 70); while Cæsar calls it very difficult (*De Bello Gallico*, iii., 1).

modern town of Aosta still preserves of the old city the shape, the plan, some buildings, and, though corrupted, the name. Like all Roman cities, Aosta was not only made powerful and ready for military duty against possible invasions, but was beautified with public buildings of all kinds, and life soon began to thrive merrily in the newly born community, where, as everywhere else, order, system, and peaceful business followed in the wake of the Roman arms.

In the long era of quiet that overspread the world with the accession of Augustus to the supreme power, Augusta Prætoria in the middle of the valley, and Eporedia at its lower end, progressed rapidly. Augusta was the centre of the rather restricted life of the valley, the place where its agricultural products, the gold, silver, the lead and copper from its mines, were gathered and prepared for trade; there were the military stores and command, the centre of local political activities; there, too, were shops to supply the numerous passing trains of merchants. The city—although we have no figures to know its population exactly—occupied a much larger area than the present town, which gives the impression of having plenty of space to roam about, within the square limits of the old walls.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About 8 B.C., Augustus, coming back from Gaul, passed through the valley—by that time known in his honour as *Vallis Augustana*—and stopped in the city named for him, to admire the works of Roman genius. It was then that a great danger hung over this Chief of the Roman Empire, and only by the intervention of an abler Providence than man's was it averted. Some one asked to see the Roman general, and the general received him at once, while he was standing on the road near a perilous precipice. The man was a Gaul and a treacherous plan of vengeance did he nourish in his bosom: the blood of the conqueror, hurled over the cliff behind him, should appease the wrath of the decoyed Salassi, toiling in slavery. But the valley of Aosta seems fated to lead men of destiny into the most hair-raising plights, only to allow them to escape by the narrowest margin. Napoleon, in just such a thrilling experience, disentangled himself from a snare into which chance had led him,[1] and so did Augustus escape. When the Gaul found himself in the presence of the

[1] In May, 1800, Napoleon, during a reconnoitring tour near St. Vincent, suddenly surprised alone by an Austrian officer with a squad of soldiers, saved himself from capture only by his ready presence of mind. He engaged the officer in so lively a conversation that his own larger escort had time to come up, and then all the Austrians were taken prisoners instead.

Emperor, so serene did his face look and so friendly was his demeanour, that all evil purpose faded out of mind, and Augustus went onward to complete his eventful mission.[1]

As for Eporedia, its population grew to over a hundred thousand inhabitants; it was then probably the largest city of the whole valley of the Po, west of Milan. The trip over the Alps was an enterprise of respectable magnitude, fraught with natural dangers and much fatigue. As there was no other means of getting over the heights than by walking—mules carrying the loads—and walking is slow, it is possible that a caravan of merchants did not employ less than a week in travelling from Eporedia to Octodurus (later, Forum Claudii, now Martigny), or two weeks to Lugdunum (Lyons). Eporedia was therefore the place where travellers naturally stopped to rest after arriving, or organised their caravans before starting; where the merchants of the plains came to meet those of the mountains, and the merchants of Italy to meet those from Gaul; a great trading centre, a hotel city bustling with the activities of lively transit and of brisk exchange, like some big modern railroad centre.

The fact that the Roman Eporedia was so much

[1] Suetonius, *Augustus*, 79.

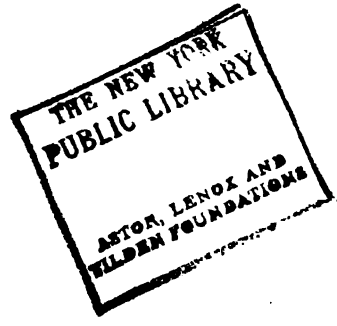
larger than the modern Ivrea, explains why its people so often make rich finds of Roman relics when they excavate for foundations of houses, or for wells in the neighbourhood of the present town. Eporedia was apparently a prominent, centre for the barrel industry—if we may so call the receptacle that in Roman times took the place of the barrel, the clay *amphora;* so must one conclude from the number of vessels of that type that have been found massed in different spots, as if kept in store and ready for shipment. *Amphoræ* were used to carry water, wine, and oil; but the workmen that dig in and about Ivrea have discovered that they once had also another use—as depositories for money—perhaps as domestic savings-banks. One may reckon almost to a certainty that when a ditch-digger finds an amphora he will immediately smash it, to see if there be hidden treasure within it. Generally the treasure is wanting, and he loses the worth of the amphora.

Sometimes, however, treasure is actually found, and the story goes that a few years ago a ditch-digger, who had thus come into possession of several thousand silver coins, used them to buy cigars: whereupon, the cigar dealer, a shrewd fellow, through his liberality persuaded the ditch-digger to buy only of him, then made a snug

fortune by disposing of the coins to museums and private collectors.[1]

Later times changed the good fortune of both Augusta and Eporedia considerably; the competition of other passes, farther south and farther east, already made itself felt during the fourth and fifth centuries of the Empire. At present, with railroads diverting all international traffic through other channels, and no industries of great account, Aosta and Ivrea drowse at ease in their sunny hollows.

[1] The author has this story from a resident of Palazzo Canavese (Ivrea), who bought a number of the coins from the cigar dealer.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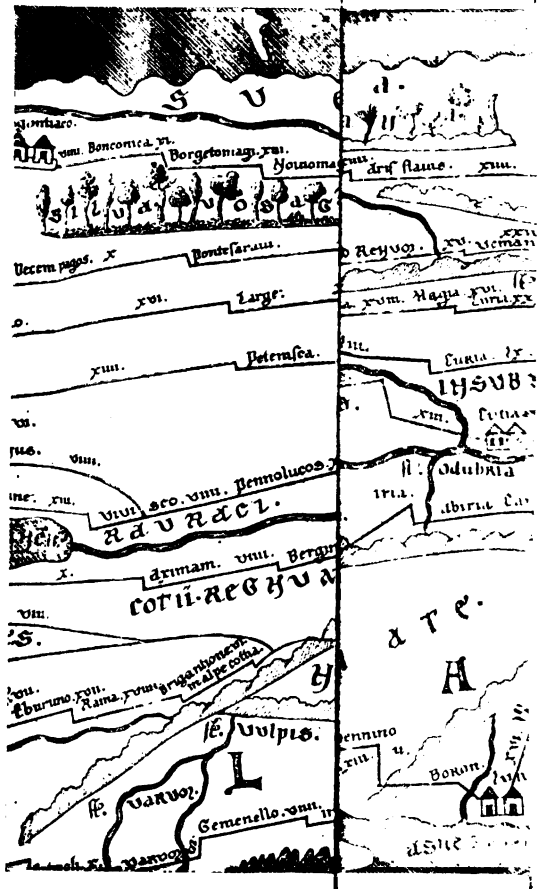


A Section of the Tabula Pe

(From Milan to Lake of Geneva and f

CHAPTER II

THE CONSULAR ROADS

EPOREDIA, as we said, was the real starting-point for the mountain journey over the two passes of the Vallis Augustana; there originated the great consular road of the valley, and there ended the two great consular roads that connected Eporedia and the valley with Milan, in an easterly direction, and Piacenza, toward the south, and through these cities with the immense net of roads that covered the whole Roman Empire, from the Caledonian wall to the cataracts of the Nile. With the help of the *Tabula Peutingeriana*,[1] of the *Itineraria*,[2] of the ancient geographers, and the corroboration of its numerous remains in the valley, the road can be easily traced throughout.

Although authors and documents do not mention any other highway in the valley, one should

[1] Tabula Itineraria Peut.

[2] Chiefly, Itinerarium provinciarum Ant. Aug.

not think that the road built after the victory of Appius Claudius Pulcher, by order, it is said, of Caius Gracchus,[1] was the only one existing there. The valley was thickly populated and the houses of the inhabitants were to be found at the extreme ends of the side valleys, as well as along the wider and more prosperous bottom of the main valley: to the far villages and hamlets, to each isolated farm, there led roads and paths, which either the state, or the communities, or private individuals cared for. Only, those were the minor vessels of the complex system of circulation in which the consular roads represented the main arteries; accordingly, authors and documents do not mention them—just as we do not find in a modern railroad map traces of roads or paths leading to outlying settlements, these being outside the proper sphere of railroad action, though they may depend on the railroad for transportation of persons and goods. The Tabula Peutingeriana[2] and the Itineraria are made up

[1] Promis, page 89 *et seq.*

[2] This *Tabula*—a parchment roll 13 inches wide and 12 feet 7 inches long (the western end with Spain and part of Britain missing)—made no pretence at being a topographical map according to mathematical projection. It was simply a road directory, giving character and names of stops and distances between them. An angled change of level with a name indicates a minor town; larger or fortified towns are marked by towers or buildings.

somewhat on the scheme of a railway map and time-table, with due variations, a sort of guide of great routes throughout the Roman Empire.

The Romans carefully distinguished their roads according to purpose and size, on which also depended the legal matters that concerned building, maintenance, and right of way.[1] *Actus* were the smaller paths and roads; *semi-iter* and *iter* were larger roads allowing of the passage of two vehicles side by side[2]: all of these were of dirt, on natural foundation, and lack of use promptly destroyed every vestige of them through the invasion of grass, woods, and fields. The *viæ prætoriæ*, or *consulares* or *militares*, were the great turnpikes of the Empire, carefully planned and built on an artificial foundation, paved with stone, provided with road-houses (*mansiones*) for the harbouring of travelling troops and military stores; with post buildings (*mutationes*) for the change of horses in postal service (*cursus publicus*), and at given distances with fortified redoubts or towns that would vouch for the safety of the roads and their travellers.

It was one of these consular or military roads that traversed the valley of Aosta and its passes,

[1] J. Paulus, lib. i., 17 (page 58).
[2] Isidore, *Et.*, lib. xv., cap. 16.

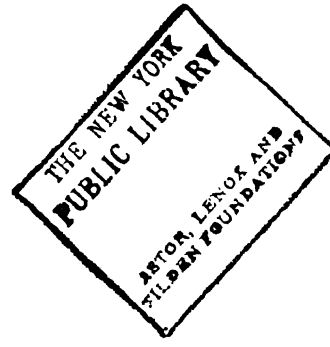
following, in the main, the same direction as the modern national highway, which, in fact, in most of its length occupies the site of the ancient one. The width of the ancient road, a trifle less than that of the modern, was sixteen Roman feet (approximately sixteen English feet), except over its greatest heights or where very difficult rock-cutting was necessary, when the width was reduced to eleven feet.

The first monumental relic of this road to be found after passing Ivrea, barring the name of the villages of Settimo (*ad septimum*,[1] or seventh mile-post from Ivrea), and Carema,[2] is the bridge at Pont St. Martin, over the torrent Helia (now Lys). It cannot be called a ruin, because it is in a perfect state of preservation, as it stands to-day, high above the stony river-bed, a single arch of splendid daring. Although no longer in use, since the national road was built somewhat lower, and circles the village to avoid its narrow and ill-paved street, the ancient bridge served its purpose for over eighteen centuries through the heats of summer and the frosts of winter, through the rage of

[1] *lapidem*, understood.

[2] Carema is supposed to be an anagram of *camera* (a vault), meaning deposits of ore from mines belonging to C. Sallustius Crispus.—Promis, page 92.

The Roman Bridge over the Lys, Pont-St.-Martin (140-120 B.C.)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storms sweeping over it and the fury of the swollen torrent beating against its solid shoulders—an anonymous monument to engineering efficiency. This bridge is especially remarkable because it is, to our knowledge, the largest single-arch Roman bridge in existence—approximately as large as any ever built by the Romans[1]; indeed, it is a work of such proportions that any modern builder might be proud of it; moreover, it offers unsurpassed opportunities for studying Roman bridge-construction.

The chord of the bridge measures a hundred and five feet; the height of the arch above the torrent is about seventy feet; the width of the roadway in the middle of the bridge is seventeen feet; at the ends, eighteen feet including the parapet. As we said before, the bridge consists of a single arch; of the circular type always found in Roman architecture, it rests on both sides upon solid rock—on account of the contour of the banks, reaching farther down on one side than on the other. The vault is made of large blocks of micaceous gneiss. At the bottom of the arch, on each side, there are imbedded in the

[1] The arch of the bridge built by Trajan on the Danube had a chord of 164 feet. The bridge itself was destroyed by Hadrian.—See Dion Cassius, lxviii., 13 (vol. iv., pages 116–117).

shoulders of solid masonry five huge boulders in the shape of regularly hewn prisms, protruding from the surface of the wall at equal distances; on the top of each there is a deep cut. Apparently these five heavier stones served during the construction of the bridge as supports for the wooden armature of the vault.

By descending to the bed of the torrent, which is half dry for many months of the year, and looking up at the vault from beneath it, one observes an interesting architectural detail. The bridge was not built entirely of a single material, but of alternating vertical layers of gneiss blocks and a sort of gravel cement—five of gneiss, enclosing four of cement; so that the arch looks as if it were made up of nine strips spanning the stream, each strip in itself an arch and one-ninth of the width of the bridge, brought and held together by some invisible medium.

This system of building seems to have been frequently employed by the Romans and to have a recognised standing in their architectural practice, under the name of *emplecton*.[1] Examples of the system can often be found in Roman buildings: for instance, in the town walls of Aosta, where the stone facing has been taken

[1] Vitruvius, ii., 8.

away and only the gravel filling left. Strange, however, that it should have been used in erecting such a comparatively light structure as a bridge; yet it was adopted for bridges also, as is proved by the remains of an arch over the torrent Marmore, at Châtillon, visible just below the new bridge. A Roman bridge was there, of nine vertical strata, but eight of the slices have been peeled away by time and only one narrow layer of stones still stands, resting on much broader shoulders on both sides of the gorge. Whatever we may think of this manner of putting bridges together, the bridge at Pont St. Martin is a proof that very solid construction was thus possible. The parapet of the bridge is of poor mediæval make, as is also the gate, which closed the entrance to the village, at the upper end of the bridge.

After a pleasant walk of half an hour up the valley on the beautiful highroad, through a level plain of gardens and orchards, one comes to Donnaz, where the valley is suddenly closed by an immense tumble of rocks, which seems to preclude any possibility of passage. To make progress appear even more precarious, there stands a-top of the towering walls, the fortress of Bard, grim and formidable, practically useless now,

but once a dreaded guardian of this spot; for centuries it defied assault, although it could not withstand the cunning of the great Napoleon.[1]

Beyond the last houses of the village of Donnaz, one comes upon the most important remaining section of the old consular road. Where the village ends, a great ravine begins; the river Dora has eaten away one bank and left a little strip of land on the opposite side; there the line of village houses, the modern road, and the railroad are huddled together, between the tumultuous waters and the silent, but ever-impending menace of overhanging rock. In Roman times, matters were worse; the waters lashed the rocks on both sides as they whirled through the ravine. There was nothing then for the Roman engineers to do but to cut the road in the rock part way through the gorge, as far as a little cove, where they could carry it to the heights above the ravine, and so surmount the remaining stretch of difficulty. This they did, and most of the big cut, with a short tunnel they made for the road at one point is still there, a great work well done; so well done that for centuries nobody thought of improving on it. A steel engraving of 1860 still shows[2] the

[1] See part iii., chap. iv.
[2] Aubert, page 93.

gorge wholly occupied by waters, and the Roman cut the only passage practicable through it. Not until 1856 was work begun on the new section of road,[1] which, passing outside the village of Donnaz and skirting the torrent, rounds the bold obstacle of the Bard ravine at the bottom, avoiding the steep climb to the village. The new road had to be built entirely into the river, from which it was protected by heavy walls of masonry; and when the railway of the valley was added to the stage road, building operations were carried still farther into the foaming waters, on powerful stone piers.

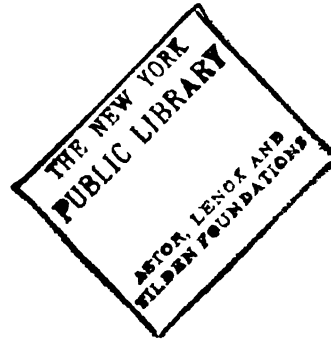
As it appears to-day, the cut at Donnaz is five hundred feet long and about forty feet high, and has a road width of about sixteen feet; the mountain wall is made perpendicular, at a perfect right angle with the road-bed. On the face of the cut, hewn out of the rock, there is a mile-stone, semicircular in relief, which bears the number XXXVI, the distance in Roman miles from Augusta Prætoria. At the lower end of the cut stands the tunnel, about sixteen feet long, sixteen feet high, and ten feet wide, through which the road passed; it was evidently bored to save some work in cutting down the rock and also served as a buttress

[1] Aubert, page 102, note.

toward the support of the mountain side. On the outside, the tunnel is gracefully decorated with lines imitating an arched gateway. This tunnel-arch was used during the Middle Ages as a town gateway for Donnaz, the hinges upon which the gate swung being still left in the rock. The tunnel has been so badly cracked by inclement weather that a supporting column of brick was recently built within it to keep it from sudden collapse. The brick pile is unsightly and occupies most of the space inside the tunnel, but it was necessary to save the vault from utter ruin. The amount of rock taken out of the Donnaz cut must have been not far from ten thousand cubic yards, and all of it was very hard porphyritic gneiss.

How was the work done? A definite answer to this question is hardly possible, since it implies a solution of the whole problem as to how the ancients worked stone, a solution that has not yet been found. Some students of historical engineering suppose that it was done by sheer manual labour with the use of cold chisel and hammer, an hypothesis not to be excluded, although such a work accomplished by hand would be of stupendous magnitude. Whether the somewhat mysterious process of heating the stone and treating it

The Roman Cut, Tunnel and Milestone, near Donnaz (140-120 B.C.)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with vinegar or water was used[1]; whether the even more mysterious explosive that Hennebert[2] is inclined to fancy under the name *acetum* of Ammianus Marcellinus and others,[3] or *oxos* of Appianus[4] was called into action; or whether the stone saws that the ancients employed in their quarries[5] had a part in the work, is probably beyond our present supply of information. An examination of the surface of the cut, which might be of primary import in coming to some conclusion, does not reveal the secret, because after the cut had been made, the engineers took care to have the whole surface as accurately smoothed over and polished as the coarse nature of the stone allowed; this, probably, for the purpose of rendering it less responsive to the influence of atmospheric and climatic conditions. All traces of the action of instruments were thus obliterated. One can make out, chiselled on the wall, some horizontal lines, interrupted at regular distances by small

[1] Pliny, xxiii., 27 (other editions, xxiii., 1). The process of loosening and splitting rocks by heating and then throwing on them a stream of cold water, has been practised, quite recently. See Sir J. Herschel's *Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy*, part i., chap. 3, § 39, page 47.

[2] Hennebert, ii., 253 *et seq.*

[3] Ammianus, xv., 10 (vol. iii., page 70); Pliny, *loc. cit.* Silius Italicus.

[4] Appianus, Alex., *Hannibal*, 4.

[5] Blümner, iii., page 76 *et seq.*

circles. Under each of these circles may also be seen, on a vertical line, other circles at a distance of exactly two Roman feet (1 ft. and 11½ inches, English), from centre to centre. These markings probably had some special function in regulating the work, but throw no light on the process itself.

The natives and some historians[1] attributed the opening of the road and the tunnel to Hannibal; some archæologists took up the tradition and tried to substantiate it with the historical argument of a tablet on the arch, in which Hannibal was declared to be the author of the mighty work. The tablet, however, is as legendary as the origin of the cut itself, and no trace is to be found of it, or, for that matter, was ever found by any investigator who did not care to take a predecessor's word for it and made independent examination of the premises.[2] That the natives should deem the great cut a work of Hannibal is surely not surprising: in the whole range of the Western Alps there are many things that have taken their name from the Punic general, even though none of them can be traced to him historically, and some are natural wonders that can be traced only to the Creator of all things. Hannibal's *strike* made a

[1] Luitprand, lib. i., chap. 9 (vol ii., part 1, page 231).
[2] Gioffredo, lib. i., page 131.

deep impression upon the primitive populations of the Alps, who were soon ready to clothe him in the mantle of the demigod; and mediæval simple-mindedness added its generous fringe to the legend of the far-famed hero.

How easy it is for legends to spring from phenomena little known or hard to understand and to cling about them, the case of the giant kettles south of Bard clearly exemplifies. On a small hill, called Mabec, there are to be seen a few of those cavities, almost cylindrical in shape, that rushing waters excavate by churning into holes with loose boulders. Some of these kettles are small, with a capacity of only three or four cubic yards. Others are giant pot-holes, with a capacity of over a hundred cubic yards. The stones that did the excavating lie at the bottom of the holes, which are now high above the waters of the torrent that dug them out. These pot-holes are by the natives called "olles des Sarrazins," store-houses of the Saracens; unable to explain their origin or their function, the wonder-loving peasants fabled that the Saracens—a rightfully dreaded people—had made them with the help of the devil and used them to store stolen goods. This legend might well be set aside to match the

Hannibalic exploits, were it not that no less a man than Carlo Promis, an archæologist of great learning and acumen, whose work on the Roman ruins of Val d'Aosta stands as the best authority on the subject, and the man who broke down the legend of Hannibal's part in the cut of Donnaz, took up the legend of the kettles and gave it the support of his ungeologic assent—with this exception, that he changed the name of the diggers from Saracens to Salassi. So, in a book of unsurpassed scientific value[1] can be read the story of how the Salassi excavated half a dozen big holes in hard rock, there to preserve their grain from moisture and theft, and kept these granaries closed with the stones that now lie in the bottom of the holes!

Geology had no difficulty in finding out the nature of the formations and dispelled the natives' legend as well as that of the archæologist. Certainly if Promis could have seen the tremendous giant kettle carved out of the rock in the sombre Gouffre de Bousserailles,[2] where the mad waters of the torrent have worked for ages, beyond the reach of human hand or eye, and even now tear through the abyss with a rage to make a bold man

[1] Promis, page 106.
[2] Near Valtournanche.

silent, he would not have risked the hypothesis that anybody could ever use pot-holes for *silos* or *siros*[1]—*i.e.*, grain elevators—sunken out of sight! Promis prudently stops with that, and simply quotes, without endorsing, the additional legend that the erratic boulders found near the kettles were the grinding wheels for the ore mills of some ancient people.

Beyond the cut of Donnaz, the Roman road passed near Bard, and just beyond this latter village its foundations are still in place, where the road-bed is interrupted by two gaps between rocky spurs. The first gap is spanned by an arch of fifteen-foot chord; and the second, too wide to be vaulted by an arch, is filled up with that type of wall, made of huge irregular stones of all sizes, which the ancients called Cyclopean.[2]

On descending from the heights of Bard into the valley, the road crossed Verrès (Vitricium), where many houses are built on Roman foundations; passed through the gorge of Montjovet (Mons Jovis) with a narrow and steep cut, still

[1] Only in very dry countries, like Africa, was grain stored in the ground.—Pliny, xviii., 73 (other editions, 30).

[2] Because of their impressiveness. See Plac. Lactantius in his commentary to Statius's *Thebais*, lib. i., verse 254 (page 65 *recto*) and verse 630 (page 70, *recto*).

existing and occasionally used when the newer and lower road is obstructed by landslides—which are comparatively frequent in that spot; and then keeping the same line as the modern road, turned toward St. Vincent.

Near St. Vincent the consular road crossed the torrent Silian on a bridge that fell in 1839; then traversing the high plateau of St. Vincent, reached Châtillon, where it passed over the Marmore by the bridge already mentioned as the one where a slice, a ninth of the original thickness, remained standing, while the rest crumbled. After Châtillon, it went through Chambave (Cambava); then, higher than the modern road, through Dienoz (*ad decimum*, ten miles from Aosta)[1]; then down again, through Nuz (*ad nonum*, nine miles from Aosta), Siettoz (*ad sextum*), Quart (*ad quartum*), finally entering the metropolis of the valley, Aosta (Augusta Prætoria), on the east side.

About half a mile before arriving at the gates of the city, we come upon a Roman bridge without a river. Under this bridge once flowed a torrent, the *Bauthegium* of the Romans, which had its source in the glaciers of the Dent d'Hérens, in high Val Pelline. To be sure, the torrent is running yet, but it has changed its name to the *Buthier*.

[1] Promis, page 111.

Very early in Roman imperial history, soon after the appearance of the bridge, there began a struggle between the stream, whose waters are swollen and violent at freshet-time, in late spring and early summer, and the narrow, obstructing arch of the bridge. The torrent pounded with all its fury against the solid shoulders of the bridge year after year and century after century, until, finally, unable to undo its antagonist, it moved off, digging for itself another channel about fifty yards away; this happened at a time indefinite, but before the twelfth century.[1] Now the bridge, two thirds of its mass buried, its shoulders concealed among the houses of the poor Bourg de Pont de Pierre, built around it, hardly reveals its once handsome proportions; yet the huge blocks of pudding-stone that make the vault, speak, as best they can, of magnificent work.

At Aosta, the consular road divided into two main branches: that running to the north passed the Grand St. Bernard (Mons Jovis) to Martigny (Octodurus); the one to the west rose over the Petit St. Bernard (Alpis Graia), toward Savoy, through the Tarantaise (Centrones).

Beyond Aosta, the road of the Petit St. Bernard

[1] According to some authors, as early as the first century of the Christian era.—Berard, page 138.

grew narrower: from the parts left we gather that —evidently because the traffic on the divided road was necessarily less intense—ten or eleven feet were considered sufficient for the actual road-bed, the over-all width, including the parapet, being somewhat greater. It seems that part of the road as far as Villeneuve followed the right bank of the Dora, instead of the left, occupying approximately the place of the present mule-path[1]; but data are rather uncertain. Traces can be picked up here and there, close by the modern highway. At St. Pierre there are ruins of embankments, and a cut in the rock; at Villeneuve there are inscriptions, and some houses and the castle rest on Roman foundations; at Liverogne there are the ruins of a bridge. Beyond Liverogne, in the long gorge that through Ruinaz ends at the Pierre Tailée, are numerous remains of the splendid embankments that supported the Roman road, somewhat higher than the modern. Those buttresses, walls, pilasters, and arches that held the ancient road, now in many places protect the new road at their feet from landslides and falls of rock. After the gorge, the Roman road crossed the river on the bridge of the Equiliva, the ruins of which are still standing; the body—like that of the bridges of Liverogne

[1] Berard, page 89.

and Chaon and Roche-Tailée—was destroyed in 1691 by a retreating French army.[1]

On the consular highway were the villages of Derby (Arebrigium) and Palleusieux (Palesiacum), beyond which it ascended the heights of La Thuile (Ariolica), and over the ruined bridge of Pont Serrand reached the Pass and the Hospice. Between Balme and La Thuile, it seems to have followed the left bank of the torrent, more protected from avalanches than the right side, where the modern road is built.[2]

The Roman road of the Great St. Bernard climbed to the pass of Mons Jovis (*in summo Pennino*) through La Clusa (Clausuræ Augustanæ), and St. Rhémy (Endracinum), therefore following necessarily the main general direction of the modern turnpike. It has left no traces of itself below the pass, but there is a strong historical presumption that instead of starting from the city of Aosta and following the right bank of the Buthier, it branched out from the main road before reaching the buried bridge on the Bauthegium and kept to the left bank of the torrent almost as far as Étroubles[3]; in several villages of the left side of the valley, in fact, there have been discovered

[1] De Tillet.
[2] Aubert, page 44.
[3] Promis, page 122.

Roman inscriptions and remains, and near Allain was that cave where the stolen treasure of Augustus came to light half a century ago. On the pass, however, there is actually a section of the old road, about two hundred feet long, cut in the rock, near the lake (Lacus Penus). It had purposely been sunk, to protect the traveller from the fierce gales that sweep the pass. The width of the cut at the road-bed is twelve feet; through this cut, the traveller reached the highest part of his journey and the hospitable *mansio* that in the name of Jupiter Penninus offered him shelter and refreshment.

Other passes where remains of Roman travel have been found in the shape of coins of the first emperors—wanting the better witness of constructions, to testify to the ancient movements—are the Col de la Seigne in the Allée Blanche and the Col du Théodule in Val Tournanche. The Col de la Seigne was called *Cremonis jugum*, and is even definitely named as the pass over which Hannibal entered Italy.[1] This fact, owing to the doubts expressed as to the presence of Hannibal in the Val d'Aosta at all, have caused some one to suppose that *Cremonis jugum* and *Alpis Graia*

[1] Cœlius Antipater, *ex* Livy, lib. xxi., cap. 39 (page 44).

were the same thing.[1] But the Roman coins and the traces of the Roman road beyond the Col de la Seigne prove sufficiently that the two passes were distinct, and that Cœlius in giving that out-of-the-way pass as Hannibal's route probably accepted a current rumour, without taking the trouble of investigating further, or perhaps had too vague a knowledge of the far and unexplored mountain system, even to suspect the possibility of a mistake—a very pardonable mistake, after all, at his time, when Roman legions rarely ventured beyond the Apennines into the valley of the Po, not to speak of the formidable barrier of the Alps.

[1] Vaccarone (*Vie*), page 48.

CHAPTER III

AUGUSTA PRÆTORIA

WHAT Aosta holds within its limits of Augusta Prætoria is in many ways remarkable: the extensiveness of the ruins—which ranks Aosta, as we said, with Rome and Pompei—the very good condition or the unusual size of some of them, and chiefly the fact that they belong to the late republican time, places them among the survivors of an age, the building achievements of which have disappeared, and makes them the best and largest assemblage of older Roman ruins known.

Moreover, Augusta Prætoria, unlike Rome, *was* "built in a day": by order of Augustus there rose a city of not indifferent size with all appurtenances for permanent residence and home comfort, where before there stood only a permanent camp in the midst of spreading fields. From Augusta Prætoria we can therefore draw interesting lessons as to the ideas embodied by the Romans in the erection of a city *ex novo*, when such ideas could have free

play and were unhampered by the exigencies of preceding abodes; and such ideas will appear, through this object lesson, strikingly sound and modern. Augusta Prætoria corroborates the knowledge of city building to be gathered in its contemporaries Timgad and Lambœsis, which the sands of the Algerian deserts buried in their drift—reserving for them a kindlier fate than Augusta had to meet at the hands of invading barbarian hordes. If it were only a matter of permanent camps, the numerous *castella*, found along the ancient confines of the Empire, in Southern Germany, in Austria, and in Hungary, would serve the purpose as well: the Saalburg, near Frankfurt a./M., now pompously bedecked with shiny tiles, through the generosity of an imperial restoring fever, could show like an illustrated lecture, without any help of the imagination, just where the gates were, and the *horreum* and the *prætorium*, and so on. But Aosta was more than a permanent camp; it was a real city. Let us therefore proceed to see how matters were arranged; it may be that the skill which restored the Saalburg will be of some use in guiding us. We start at the point where we left the consular road, coming up the valley, at the bridge on the Bauthegium.

Having crossed the Roman bridge over no Bauthegium and the Italian bridge over the Buthier, in a few minutes the road passes beneath an arch, the arch of Augustus. It is wrongly called a triumphal arch, because Aosta was no place for triumphs, even though Augustus had conquered and slain more than the five thousand required for that honour[1]: Rome was the only city that could bestow the privilege and enjoy the pageant of a triumph. Augustus, however, on that particular occasion refused the triumph decreed to him by the Senate, but accepted, instead, the tribute of an arch erected in the Alps.[2] The arch of Aosta, being the one in question,[3] might, with a certain show of reason, be called a triumphal arch, but properly it is a monument put up in honour of the founder of the colony and to commemorate the final acquisition of the region to the Roman sovereignty.

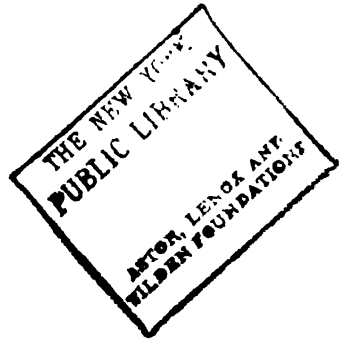
The arch, built in 23 B.C., of massive stone

[1] Val. Max., ii., 3; Orosius, v., 4 (page 925).

[2] Dion Cassius, lib. liii., 26 (vol. 3, page 165).

[3] The arch mentioned by Dion Cassius is often supposed to be that of La Turbie (Maritime Alps); for the inscription on it see Pliny, iii., 20. Promis, with a very clever interpretation of the expression ἀψὶς τροπαιοφόρος, used by the Greek historian to describe an arch for which the Greek language had no word, and with the help of dates, proves that the arch of Dion could be no other than that of Aosta, ten years older than the Turbie arch.—Promis, pages 190 *et seq.*

The Arch of Augustus, Aosta (24 B.C.)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masonry (*opus quadratum*), pudding-stone being the material used, is now stripped of all ornaments and also of the crenellated top that probably decorated it; but it is otherwise in perfect condition. It is a free and very clever adaptation of classical Greek style to Roman seriousness of purpose and the sound simplicity of the republican era, designed by an able and independent architect who made several revolutionary innovations—some having had no known imitators, as well as no known precursors.

The structure shows a rare combination of Corinthian columns with a Doric entablature. The arch proper is as wide as the road itself, and in order to avoid too heavy a foundation, or to reach a height of the whole disproportionate to the width, it was kept quite low, with the unusual and daring device of resting it on two very short pilasters. Since the space between the curve and the entablature would have been too broad for harmony, the architect filled it up—following ancient models—with big wedges; and again, to break the unsightliness of such a wide crown of wedges around the arch, he adopted the singular scheme of dividing it in two with a small salient cornice parallel to the curve; then the upper zone of the divided wedges ends in the columns, while the

lower one reaches down to the pilasters. There is no key-stone.

The whole monument is of extraordinary attractiveness and harmony, and of severe beauty. Its total height is now forty-five feet; all its parts can be measured in Greek feet and not in Roman.[1] The two niches on each side once held statues. The level of the road, curiously enough, is now lower under the arch than it was, and thus leaves exposed two rows of foundation stones (*opus quadratum*, resting on *opus incertum* lower down).

High within the curve of the arch, occupying the position of a chord, extends a strong iron bar, which supports a huge crucifix, reaching to the vault. This sign of the Second Rome was put there some six or seven centuries ago, a symbol of the Second Italy, grown upon the First. Representatives of the Third Italy, also, are rarely wanting—a bent old woman, a pair of jolly urchins, at the base of the arch basking in the sun.

In 1605 and following years, the Council of the Duchy of Aosta, with a thoughtfulness unwonted for those times when little consideration was given to ancient monuments, had the present slanting

[1] Promis, page 188. Greek foot: English foot: Roman foot::25: 24: 23.7.

roof put on the arch, to protect it from the further devastating action of rain, snow, and frost.

Beyond the arch, the road, for a short distance shaded by trees, is soon engulfed between two rows of shabby-looking houses and rather tortuously reaches the gates of the city. In Roman times, this part of the highway was a straight boulevard, almost double the width of the consular road, which, with an unobstructed stretch of exactly twelve hundred Roman feet, made an imposing approach for the even more imposing Porta Prætoria, the main gate of the city.

Though the Prætorian gate is still in very good condition, its lower part, at least, does not show to advantage, crowded in as it is among worthless buildings that have encroached on all sides, preempting portions of walls and rooms that rightfully should not belong to them. Moreover, the pavement of the present street is about ten feet above the level of the ancient pavement; and this, of course, awkwardly shortens the arches and alters the fair proportions of the various parts.

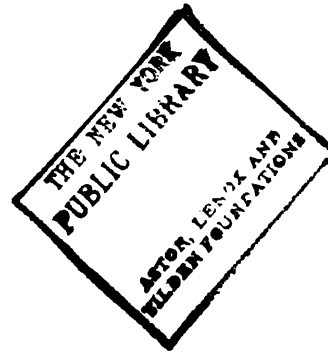
Still, taken as it is, the Porta Prætoria is the largest and handsomest Roman gate left for the people of to-day to admire; the ancient gates of Rome—all of the latest imperial time—being far

from comparable with it. Its plan includes, like that of the Porta Erculanensis of Pompei and that of the Porta Nigra of Trier (Rhineland, Germany), a square military court and a double set of passageways; but the Porta Erculanensis of Pompei is a small brick pile of no practical use, designed as a gateway merely for decorative effect, and the Porta Nigra of Trier (Augusta Trevirorum), while higher, because the superstructure is in better condition, surrounds a much smaller court.

The size of the space enclosed in the Porta Prætoria, approximately eighty by thirty-one feet, allowed a considerable body of troops to be lined up, ready for defence, or a sortie, at a moment's notice, or for reserves outside of the limits of the city proper; and at the same time made it necessary for an attacking enemy that had forced the outside gates, to overcome a second obstacle at the interior gates under the active resistance of defending troops, occupying the second story of the court.

Besides the two towers, buildings, containing stairways to the upper floor, flanked the court; but they have been invaded by private dwellings and the towers have been torn down with all the upper part of the gates, to furnish building material to mediæval petty lords. Thus, the tower

Porta Praetoria, Aosta (24 B.C.). Outer Gateways from the Outside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that rises on the inner wall of the court belongs to the Middle Ages, though partly put together with evidently pirated stone blocks.

To get a fair impression of the size of the gates, it is necessary only to step under the arched passages and look at their stupendous thickness; above the head of the wondering observer hang huge blocks of pudding-stone that together measure from side to side no less than fifteen feet in the outer wall of the court and eleven and a half on the inner! These enormous walls, which could easily resist even the shattering action of modern bursting shells—much thicker and stouter than the cement bomb-proof armour of batteries in modern forts—connect on both sides of the square with the city walls, once lower than the gate construction, now standing at about the same height. From the second story of the court, passages gave access to the watch-walk, and through this to the watch-towers along the wall, thus offering an upper line of defence entirely independent of the city streets. The gateway as a whole protruded about twenty-seven feet beyond the outside line of the walls.

The passages in the gate were three on each side of the court: one central for carriages, about twenty-eight feet wide, and two lateral, lower

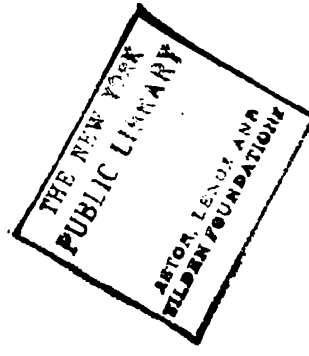
and narrower, each about nine feet wide, for pedestrians: the present height of the middle arch is about twenty feet. The passages are now free, but in Roman times they could be closed by portcullises (*cataractæ*), lowered from the upper story through openings in the floor.

The outside of the gate is faced with marble, and had once niches for statues; these have been variously filled up—in one of them nestles a little chapel to the Madonna, which is thoroughly out of tone with the rest of the building, though quite in keeping with the houses of the shabby Bourg St. Ours.

The gate left behind us, we might proceed directly up the street that opens in front, leading in an approximately straight line across to the walls on the opposite side of the city, along the once main thoroughfare of the Roman settlement, but for a better understanding of the arrangement of city quarters, we find it more advisable to turn at a right angle and first follow the walls.

From whatever side we approach Aosta—whether it be on the south from the railroad station, or on the east over the road from the lower valley, or on the west over the road from the upper valley, or, finally, on the north over the

Porta Praetoria, Aosta (24 B.C.). Inner Gateways from the Court of Arms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road from the Grand St. Bernard—it is always Augusta Prætoria that greets us first with the powerful enclosure of its ancient walls. The founder of the Roman city, having built it on the spot where the camp was, kept the plan of the camp, extending it as need required, thus following the custom practised in erecting many another permanent colony in Italy and beyond the Alps. This means that the new city received a perfectly regular contour and a perfectly geometrical arrangement. In other colonies, the form was absolutely square—as in Turin (Augusta Taurinorum) and in Pavia—but the shape of Augusta Prætoria was rectangular, a difference of trifling importance; the sides of the rectangle are almost exactly a third of a mile (north and south) by a half (east and west), as measured along the city walls. These yet encompass the town in their entirety, and although in some parts dilapidated can be followed and in most places inspected now from a street, now from a field, wherever beggarly mediæval and modern dwellings have not found it convenient to ask of the solid old defence support for their frail frames, or the saving of building a whole side: considering their comparatively moderate extent, the walls can be examined during a walk of pleasant length.

Although still standing, the walls have been in many places so persistently peeled off and robbed of material for building that in some spots what is left looks like a bare skeleton, sadly in want of wires and iron props. This lifting away of material from the sides of the walls instead of the top alone has been made possible through the careless neglect of ages by the very nature of their construction. The type of building here adopted was the already described *emplecton*. This system of construction resulted in walls made up of three vertical, juxtaposed layers of stone masonry; an outside one of square blocks of limestone (*opus quadratum*), an inside one of irregular stone pieces and splinters (*opus incertum*), and finally a filling of gravel cemented together with such excellent mortar as to make a kind of artificial pudding-stone of prodigious toughness. The outside layer of square blocks was the first to go: it has disappeared almost everywhere, and on the south side on the spot where it was best preserved, has sustained the supreme injury of being torn down with all the rest of the wall to make space for the new road from the station, which might less ill-advisedly have been put through at some weaker point near by. The *op usincertum* has been plundered more sparingly, since it was not so

easy to handle as the clean-cut blocks of limestone; but it has, nevertheless, been cut off in many places. As for the *emplecton*, it has to a great extent been left to itself, for it is about as easy to quarry stone from the rocks in the mountains as to pull down that hard mixture in any form convenient to utilise again; yet it has not always escaped different kinds of deleterious action.

The walls were six feet thick at the summit, which stood twenty-eight feet from the ground without merlons, and thirty-four feet with the merlons. On the inside they were strengthened by stone piers, projecting ten feet, placed at a distance of forty feet from one another; on these piers rested a broad watch-walk, fourteen feet wide, of heavy planks, with the additional support of strong timbers. The planks and the timbers are, of course, long gone, but in the existing stone piers can be seen the impost-like arrangement on which the timber rested.

At the four corners of the city rectangle stood four watch-towers; other towers were built at regular intervals on the walls, three on each of the longer sides, two on each of the shorter, and two at the two *Portæ* opposite each other—*Prætoria* and *Decumana*—making a total of eighteen.

Most of these towers are still in existence, but very much modified, as they were enlarged and used as strongholds and habitations by timid lords during the darkest periods of the Dark Ages (before 1000 B.C.—enlarged at the expense of the walls[1]).

The fact that the towers, whether still in good condition or falling to pieces, show such evident signs of mediæval arrangement, led to the supposition that the Romans had no towers at all,[2] and that all were built later, beginning with the first invasion of Burgundians under Gundicar (407–413 A.D.), whose son Gundive was recognised as vassal-sovereign of the valley.

The arrangement of regular distance between the towers and the existence of one, which, except for partial restoration, is in the original state, make it clear that they were built in with the walls.[3] The tower extant, called *Pailleron*, near the road to the station, is a square structure of the same type as the walls, with two stories above them and two rows of three arched openings on each floor.

The rectangular enclosure of the city had, as

[1] Berard, page 171.
[2] Loche (Turin).
[3] Promis, page 133.

we saw, an entrance in the Porta Prætoria, to the east; it had a second one, Porta Decumana, opposite, on the western side, built in a similar manner, though of smaller proportions,[1] the poor relics of which were entirely removed in 1810. Of the existence of these two gateways there is no doubt, because one is there to speak for itself, and the other lasted so long into our own day that eye-witnesses left descriptions and drawings of it, and the authorities the record of the order of destruction.

Modern Aosta, however, has four more gates, two on the north side, and two, corresponding, on the south: were any or all of these present in the ancient city? Some say they were; others say they were not: the older sets of archæologists,[2] claim that all six were Roman, while the more recent insist that only two, the main *Portæ*, were Roman.[3] In reality, both parties to the controversy seem to be in the wrong. The gates now to be found in the north and south walls of Aosta are certainly modern. Augusta Prætoria, however, was built on the plan of a camp, and a camp with only two gates would be an anomaly without

[1] De Tillet.
[2] Loche (Turin), and other archæologists.
[3] Promis, page 131. Berard accepts Promis's version.

example in Roman military architecture; gates such as would be necessary to facilitate the rapid movements of troops were always four, one on each side, as we gather from the descriptions of those who knew from personal observation.[1]

That Augusta was built like a camp, in spite of its being a city, is proved not only by its shape and arrangements of streets, but also by the names of the gates and of some of the streets, which were still in use in the early Middle Ages: the *rue Quintana* (Via Quintana was one of the broadest cross-streets of the camp[2]) is mentioned in a document concerning a sale of real estate in Aosta, of 1053.[3] This natural presumption is confirmed by the discovery, made in the excavations by F. d'Andrade under the tower of Bramafam, in 1893, of the ruins of a Roman gate that must have been one of the two *portæ principales*. That this gate is not set midway in the walls, is no argument to conclude that there must have been another couple of gates to make things symmetrical, for, the *portæ principales* of camps did not, as a rule, correspond to the middle line of the camp itself. The street that now connects the *porta principalis*

[1] See Hyginus and Polybius, lib. vi.

[2] Lipsius, lib. v., dial. iii., (vol. iii., pages 250 and 253).

[3] Monumenta Historiæ Patriæ, Charta No. 337 (vol. i., page 574).

sinistra (Bramafam gate) with the opposite gate of St. Etienne—where the corresponding gate, the *porta principalis dextra* must have stood—is said by Promis to correspond to the Via Sagularia of the camp, and not to the Via Principalis, at both ends of which the *portæ principales* properly opened[1]; still, Promis's statement is a matter of discussion and does not rest on the incontrovertible authority of evident documents.

In conclusion, it seems to be fair to assume that Augusta Prætoria's gates were four, of which three have been located and the position of the fourth can be easily surmised; they were surely not two alone, and there is no reason to suppose that they were six.

The first thing the Romans did in laying out a town was to mark the streets and put in the sewers. Had we entered from the Porta Prætoria in ancient times, we should have seen before us a straight, broad thoroughfare, reaching to the Porta Decumana, well-paved, and with ample side-walks, the *Via Prætoria*, the main channel of traffic of the city, having a width of thirty-two feet.

Now, also, there is a street running between the

[1] Promis, page 138.

two Portæ, in an approximately straight line; this, *rue Umbert I.*, is likewise the main town thoroughfare; only, its width is much diminished, the paving is far from showing Roman accuracy and solidity, and as for sewers, there are none: a little stream of water runs in a mid-street channel. The Roman pavement, where still in existence, is buried eight to ten feet below the present level, and the Roman sewers lie, a forgotten object-lesson, still farther down, five feet below the Roman pavement.

The Via Prætoria was crossed at right angles by three—or perhaps only two—side-streets, also broad and straight; these, as well as the Via Prætoria, are repeated in modern Aosta. The eight blocks so formed by the main streets of the city were, in their turn, divided by minor passages into at least four rectangular blocks each. Ancient cities, like modern colonial towns and American cities, were built on the simplest plan imaginable—that of a chess-board. Two large blocks on the right of the Via Prætoria—entering from the Porta Prætoria—corresponding to the surface of eight minor blocks, were taken up by public edifices of all kinds.

Very near the Porta Prætoria was to be found

the amusement quarter, with the theatre and the amphitheatre. Of the theatre there still stands a portion of a wall, something over seventy feet in height, a magnificent piece of construction, having entrance arches and three rows of windows of different shapes. The wall is of extreme simplicity, yet of great elegance and impressiveness; its main parts—the arches, the gigantic piers running from bottom to top and skilfully treated as ornamental motives in lieu of columns—and the facing of the lower parts are of big pudding-stone blocks (*opus quadratum*), with rough finish; the rest is *opus incertum*. The lower story and particularly the arched entrance passages are encumbered with houses of mean appearance, which badly mar the view of the whole; but the three rows of windows stand free, gigantic against the sky and the distant snow-clad peaks, black with age and weather, unshaken.

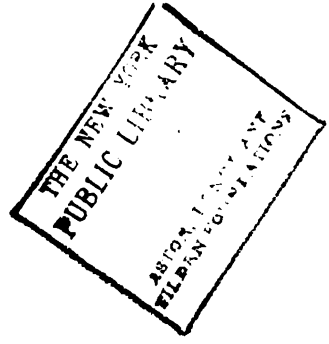
The theatre of Aosta, from the ruins that can be traced among the houses, sufficient to reconstruct its plan, was different from the prevailing type of Greek and Roman theatres. Built inside the city gates and in rather cramped quarters, it had a rectangular outline, into which the tiers of seats so fitted that only the lowest formed a semicircle; the upper ones were mere segments.

Farther to the north—more exactly, in the north-eastern corner of the walls—where now stands the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Augusta Prætorians could find their amphitheatre for open-air games and sports. The rather scanty remains are located in the garden of the convent. While the amphitheatre in itself does not show anything very particular or very different from other monuments of the kind, the facts are worthy of notice, that it is built inside the walls instead of outside, as was the general custom; that it is the oldest stone amphitheatre of which ruins are extant, if not quite the oldest built by the Romans[1]; and that it, therefore, does not show the *carceres* (caves) for the wild beasts, as combats with beasts were not yet known among the Romans in Augustan times.

In the third major block of Augusta Prætoria, there was once a building in the shape of a vast quadrangle, three hundred feet square, surrounding a huge court, in the middle of which stood a small temple. On three sides of the quadrangle, the building was nothing but a long corridor; on the fourth side, toward the south, it had a single

[1] The first one was built by Statilius Taurus in Rome in 27 B.C.—Dion Cassius, li., 23.

The Outside Wall of the Roman Theatre, Aosta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colonnaded wall and two entrances. The corridor was twelve feet wide, extended eight feet lower than the city pavement, and had a row of small windows on the inside, but no opening to the outside.

This building, supposed to be a granary (*horreum*), is still in large part in existence, but it is impossible to view or study it in its entirety, and next to impossible to see any part of it, because it lies in the northern part of the town near the cathedral, under the house of the archdeacon and dwellings adjacent, and the arches and windows gape only in dark cellars and even below them, through modern structures of all sorts. The vaults of the *horreum* once guarded the city's supply of food: they now guard the wine supply of private Aostan citizens; but, aside from the change in the merchandise, the function is unaltered.

In front of the *horreum* is supposed to have extended the forum: this reached to the site of the present Piazza Carlo Alberto, which was probably occupied by a basilica.

To this basilica, or to another building in the forum, belonged a vault, which was discovered in excavating to lay the foundations of the town hall, and which offered the interesting feature of

having *amphoræ* (clay vases) walled in with the masonry to lighten the whole construction—an obvious prophecy of the modern hollow brick.

We have said that the Romans in building their cities first laid out streets and sewers. The streets, at least the main ones, correspond to the existing streets; and, though less precisely, it can be shown that even some of the modern alleys follow the direction of the small ancient streets, the *viæ vicinariæ*. In doing this, the remains of the sewers are of great assistance.

The town site is a plain, slightly inclined toward the Dora, and the sewer system was so arranged that each thoroughfare had a main, connecting with the mains from cross streets by means of open pits, and that the whole discharged into the Dora by means of several tunnels. The mains have been discovered in many parts of the city under the streets now in use, and in some cases followed for some distance. Several of the junctions have also been found and drawings of them made, showing the care that was taken in building them. The main sewers had a grossly trapezoidal section ($2\frac{1}{4}$ x $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet), reaching to the street at regular distances through man-holes (3 feet in diameter). Where a minor main emptied into

a major, the mouth of the smaller main was at least three feet higher than the bottom of the larger, to avoid back-flows. From time to time, deeper holes were made, apparently to allow solid material that might be carried by the swift, running water (stones, sand, etc.), to sink to the bottom, where they could not obstruct the flow. So great was the care taken in laying out the sewer system, that branches of sewers have been found ending in blind pockets, as if they had been built in the prospect of possible need, but had never been used.[1]

Most of the sewers that have been unearthed for purposes of study have been re-covered; one, however, used to be open years ago in the court of the Collège d' Aosta.[2] The mains emptying into the Dora were regarded as such strange and wonderful things in middle-age Aosta—when sewers were a lost art—that the inhabitants said they were tunnels dug by the Salassi of the legendary Cordelia, to enable them to make sallies from their city and suddenly attack their enemies in the rear.[3]

Aside from the buildings in the "public utility" blocks, not much else of Roman archæological

[1] Promis, page 137.
[2] Berard, page 171.
[3] Promis, page 127.

interest is to be seen in Aosta, except mosaics, impluvia, and inscriptions here and there. The other blocks were used for private dwellings and were made up of a great number of small houses, where a comfortable home-life prospered around that soul of the Roman home, the little garden with plenty of running water, to the Roman as sacred and appealing as the hearth-fire to the Anglo-Saxon: but happy home-life leaves no bequest of showy column and ponderous wall.

CHAPTER IV

MINOR RUINS

MINOR ruins of the Roman times—as usual, belonging to the late republican or early Augustan era—are scattered with bountiful generosity over the whole valley of Aosta: pieces of walls and bridges, fragments of columns, mosaics and fountains, are the heritage of almost every village; some Roman stones or bricks may be located in almost every house in the valley. A little way up the Buthier, not far from Aosta, are the ruins of old aqueducts, which carried drinking water from that stream to Augusta Prætoria; in several places the water was transported by lead pipes, and here and there pieces of these can be made out, fastened to the rocks, or firmly imbedded in masonry supports.

These little archæological crumbs are hardly worth the picking up, considering the plentiful supply of ruins of the first class. A few minor ruins there are, however, that deserve a detailed

description, because of their singularity; some of them, indeed, for size and condition ought not to be classed as minor ruins at all, were it not that their being built for very special purposes does not allow them a place in the great system of state constructions of the valley—roads and towns,—thereby taking from them the halo of great associations. In other cases, the monuments have a much restricted—albeit, in their limited field, unequalled—importance, and general attention is likely to pass them carelessly.

About two hours on foot from Aosta, on the way up the side valley of Cogne and above the village of Aimaville, there is a Roman curiosity, a structure quite unique. It is a bridge, the so-called Pondel, or Pont d' El, thrown over the torrent Grand' Eivia at the imposing height of one hundred and eighty-five feet above the average level of the waters. It was built at a spot where the valley narrows into a gorge with perpendicular banks, distant from each other only about fifty feet. On the edge of the precipice, a hundred and thirty feet above the foaming current below, rise the shoulders, one six feet and the other seven feet high; above them was thrust the arch, built of homogeneous square blocks of limestone, and

not in *emplecton* like the Pont St. Martin and Châtillon bridges: it is slightly shorter than a semicircle.

In order to reach the passable part of the banks on both sides of the river, fifty-five feet higher, the bridge was extended on solid masonry (*opus incertum*) of broken and splintered stone, in both directions—rather more toward the west than the east, as the different inclination of the banks required—until the total length of the passage reached a hundred and seventy feet. The bridge is very narrow; measuring only seven feet and a half over-all, it allows of a passageway of only three feet and a half. Its extreme thinness, coupled with its comparatively great length and its extraordinary height above the water, gives it—especially when seen from above, at a certain distance—an appearance of frailty almost dream-like, which makes one marvel how the whole thing can withstand the impact of the furious winds that drive through the gorge, or resist being carried away like a toy, a doll's bridge. Yet the fact that it is there, unimpaired and in daily use, now as nineteen centuries ago, sufficiently proves that lightness and solidity are by no means incompatible.

The strangest characteristic of the airy structure

is its double-deck arrangement of passages: the lower story is a gallery, with an entrance facing the lower side of the bridge, at each end of it, and a small opening, level with the floor, also in the lower side. While the entrances evidently gave access to the bridge, the small opening—about two and six-tenths by two feet—is supposed to have been used by workmen, who were lowered from it to make outside repairs, or perhaps to carve in place the inscription just above the centre of the arch.

Through this hole, in 1838, the archæologist Promis, held by stout ropes and strong hands, made a hazardous excursion in mid-air—a hundred and fifty feet above the savage torrent that roared far below him, as if clamouring for a victim—to be able to decipher and copy the text of the inscription, which ivy and the dirt of ages had rendered inaccessible otherwise.[1] The adventure was fruitful, as the inscription revealed to some extent the secret of the bridge.

The gallery of the lower story shows a most careful arrangement of details for the protection of the traveller. That particular point of the valley is frequently struck by hurricanes of incredible violence, blowing in either direction, from the main

[1] Promis, page 194.

valley into the secondary valley, or from the secondary valley into the main one. A man walking through the gallery would naturally be protected from the gale by the walls, if he could grope along in the dark; but since he should have light, openings had to be made, and through them the wind had free access. To avoid unpleasant consequence, the windows, one foot by one and six-tenths, were thus distributed: the upper side of the bridge, exposed usually to the more violent attacks had only twelve windows and no door; while the lower side had fifteen windows, the two entrances and the already-mentioned hole for engineering purposes.

The windows, on both sides, are at equal distances, and disposed alternately, so that any window on one side opens between two of the opposite side, in correspondence with the blank wall; in this way a direct draft was avoided. The windows of the upper side open at the height of six feet from the pavement—that is, above the head of a man of average height; those on the lower side open at the height of three and a half feet and extend for a little less than a foot and a half, thus ending somewhat lower than five feet—that is, below the head of a man of average height. In this way, while the blast entering the gallery would

break itself against the wall opposite, what of it could go through would pass either above or below the face of the traveller, thus assuring him as much comfort as, under the circumstances, was possible. If that was probably little enough, the intention was surely good.

Similar precautions were taken in many a Roman bridge. On the fallen bridge of St. Vincent,[1] where a few fragments still stand, the upper side used to have a sort of merlon arrangement, in which the crenelles could be closed by iron shutters; the merlons were over six feet high, and—with the iron shutters—protected the passenger from wind, while the parapet in the crenelles was three feet high, and, weather permitting the opening of the shutters, allowed a free view of the panorama: thus were safety and comfort on one hand, and enjoyment on the other, impartially provided for.

The upper passage of the Pondel was open, instead, and had parapets of normal height, leaving, therefore, the passer-by exposed to all the power of the wind. This upper passage is the only one used by the modern peasant, fated as he is to find his lot in care, and long disused to receiving such kindly attention to his comfort from "the govern-

[1] Promis, page 109.

ment." The lower passage, due to the ruinous state of the path, is of rather difficult, if not actually dangerous, approach.

There has been a great deal of speculation and of wordy strife among historians and archæologists as to the original use of this odd bridge. Promis [1] surmises that the lower passage was regularly used by foot passengers, there being sufficient space to accommodate two marching abreast; and that the upper one served for loaded mules, especially those carrying iron ore from the mines of Cogne to the smelters of Aimaville, since their burden would have taken too much room below: along the upper passage the mule could easily make his way, carrying his load above the height of the parapet.

Some one else considers the lower passage, instead, to have been a water channel, and the upper one a path for people. According to the historian Pingone,[2] the upper part was used for the aqueduct and the lower for persons; which would appear more plausible, if the idea of the aqueduct is at all adhered to. Another author [3] mistook it for one of the bridges of the military road of the St. Bernard; he also put an aqueduct on top.

[1] Promis, page 195.

[2] Pingone in *Miscellanea epigraphica*, Manuscript of 1550 in the R. Archives of Turin.

[3] Legnazzi, page 190.

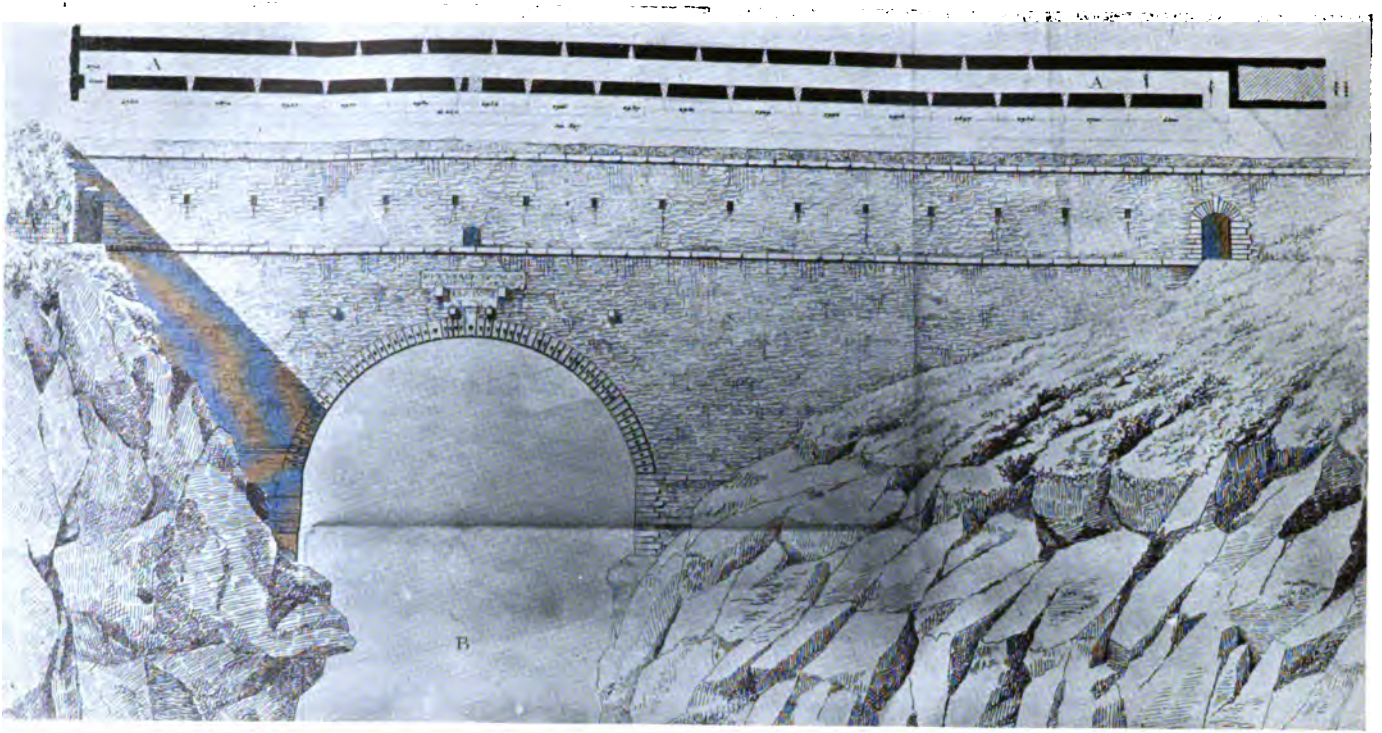
Why any bridge should be there at all, is hard to explain: the point where it stands is a long way from the line of consular roads, and, moreover, the bridge itself is too narrow for a highway. The inscription on it reads as follows:

Imp. Caesare. Augusto. XIII. cos. desig.
C. Avillius. C. F. C. Aimus. Patavinus
PRIVATUM

—and seems to indicate that the bridge was private property. The theory goes that two gentlemen of Padua, Aimus and Avillius—rich they must necessarily have been—owned estates at that point of the valley and connected them by means of this bridge; a mere inference, of course, but Aimus and Avillius must have been notabilities and intimately associated in that neighbourhood, since the village at the end of the valley—Aimaville—evidently bears their combined names: the family name Avillius occurs in other inscriptions found in Aimaville.[1]

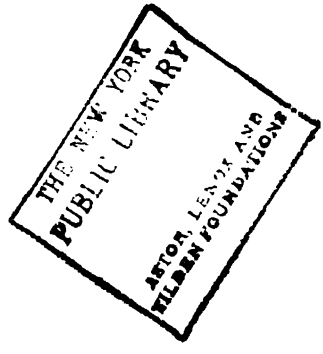
The bridge, having been built in the thirteenth consulate of Augustus, dates from the third year before the Christian era. The inscription, which is in perfect state of preservation, is not on a tablet,

[1] Promis, page 46.



The Roman Bridge, Pondel (4 B. C.)

From an engraving in Promis, "Le antichità di Aosta"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but is worked into the stone of three huge blocks, built into the bridge above the arch. The length of the inscription is nearly fifteen feet; the letters of the first two lines are a trifle over half a foot high, those of the last line (*Privatum*) are a trifle over a foot. That the *Privatum* should be made so manifest to travellers, might be interpreted as a warning of legal nature—equivalent either to an English "No trespassing," or to a "Dangerous passing," to inform the public that they were allowed upon the bridge on suffrance, at their own risk. There are other examples of such legal warnings to be found in Roman inscriptions.[1]

The ruins left on the two passes of Alpis Graia and Mons Jovis are of small account, at least as far as size goes. On the Petit St. Bernard (Alpis Graia) there are the foundations of a *mansio* (or hospice), two hundred and sixteen feet by sixty, for travellers, in the neighbourhood of a little lake just below the summit; they were uncovered by some English tourists in 1837.[2] The building was of brick and belongs to late imperial times. Traces of another building, about two hundred feet

[1] Morcelli, *De Stylo*, i., part i., chap. 4; Nardini, *Roma Antica*, lib. iv., chap. 6—ex Promis, page 33.

[2] Promis, page 118.

square, are to be found near the present hospice; belonging to an older period than the first one, it is supposed to have been either another refuge, or a small fortified military post.

A curious relic, also on the pass, is a column of porphyrous gneiss, of modest proportions (thirteen and a half feet high; its height equal to six and a half diameters), standing all alone on a rock, with no distinguishing features of any kind, such as a base or a capital—an absolutely mute monument of past ages. Tradition and the native lore have concerned themselves much with the lone shaft, and have had free play, thanks to the lack of documents. It has been regarded as belonging to a temple of Jupiter: in the Middle Ages it was said to have supported in ancient times a colossal ruby, called Jupiter's eye[1]; or to have held the statue of Jupiter, or of some Gallic god; or even to have been a beginning of the city that Caligula, the emperor of startling and not quite sane ideas, planned to build somewhere "on top of the Alps."[2]

The pass of Alpis Graia was evidently considered of little consequence, not only by Cæsar, but by all travellers, since no tablet nor any votive offer-

[1] Guichenon, i., 48.
[2] Suetonius, *Caligula*, 21.

ings were found there. The mention of it in old writers is always more or less incidental.[1]

On the Grand St. Bernard (Mons Jovis), which was deemed much more portentous a passage, numerous votive offerings and tablets, besides a Roman eagle, have been found among the ruins of the *mansio*, and in the heap of débris that marks the site of the temple of Jupiter, between the lake and the modern hospice. From the ruins, the monks of the hospice have gathered inscriptions, bronze weapons and statuettes, ornaments, rings, five thousand coins, besides small objects of all kinds, and collected them into a little museum attached to the hospice. If it were possible to drain the deep, cold lake, many more things could be brought to light: the modest and simple traveller, who could not afford to make a large offering to Jupiter in his temple, was wont, as he passed by, to throw something into the lake—a small coin, a medal, any trinket whatsoever, as a token of pious devotion, which the generous Father of Gods and Men repaid with his good will.

The inscriptions have been copied and studied by many authors, but generally with little care. An almost complete collection, twenty-eight in

[1] See, for instance, Tacitus, *Hist.*, ii., 66.

number, is to be found, for the first time accurately edited, in Mommsen.[1] Promis added two more to the collection, bringing the number to thirty.[2] As far as their time can be learned from the manner of the workmanship, the type of the letters, and the form of the Latin, the inscriptions extend over a long period, from the early Empire to the first barbarian invasion.

When the Roman Empire fell, and its authority, its power, and its splendid social organisation disappeared, Mons Jovis was for a long time one of the last strongholds of paganism, already under the ban; in 585 in that neighbourhood, as well as in parts of Switzerland, the tenacious mountaineers were still holding fast to the religion of their fathers, against the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church.[3]

Later, the pass began to be the haunt of brigands, and the temple of Jupiter Penninus, a storehouse for booty. Political darkness set in over the pass, as over the whole valley and the whole civilised world of the time. For five or six centuries,

[1] Mommsen (*Helv.*), pages 7–10. The number of inscriptions reproduced by Mommsen is exactly 31; the last three, however, being composed of only one or two letters, hardly deserve the name.

[2] Promis, pages 61 *et seq.*

[3] *Mabillon*, i., 296.

until men began slowly to awake from the heavy swoon into which the convulsion of the German migrations had thrown them, the shadow of death reigned, and left no record but that of sinister dreams. Only after the pious work of the holy Bernard, had the hospice, this time under the protection of Christ and the Cross, so well re-established its fame and usefulness, that an unknown poet of the tenth century could sing—with better piety than Latin:

Domum fecit caritatis
Ubi data dantur gratis
Nec quæruntur præmia.
Ubi panis, vinum, ligna
Numquam crescunt, sed maligna
Sunt ibi contraria.
Nix et algor, via dura,
Fumus, nubes et obscura
Sunt ibi perennia.
A Bernardo facta domo
Illam adit quisquis homo
Habet necessaria.[1]

Translated, this sequence might read:

He made this house of charity, where gifts are granted free;
Nor sought is recompense;

[1] Sequentia in Acta Sanctorum, June 15.

Where bread and wine and wood to warm, grow not, but things malign
Are there intractable;
And snow and cold, an arduous way, fog, clouds, the dreary dark,
Are there perennial.
Bernard, he made this house, and whosoe'er doth enter it,
Hath each necessity.[1]

Traces of Roman mining are rather uncertain, although the frequent reference in Latin authors to mines of gold, silver, lead, and iron of the Vallis Augustana, make it quite likely that some of the abandoned works may be attributed to Roman rather than to more recent times.

Courmayeur used to be called *Auri fodinæ*,[2] so thoroughly identified was it with the mining of gold. At a climb of about an hour and a half above the village, on the way to Mont Saxe, six thousand feet above sea-level, there is a net of tunnels and shafts that is called the *Trou des Romains* (The Romans' Hole). There seems to be no doubt that those are abandoned mine works of stupendous proportions; as the tunnels (about seven feet by seven) run in different directions and at different levels, connected by circular, vertical

[1] Trans. by Frances Ferrero.
[2] Aubert, page 49.

shafts of small diameter, and extend altogether for many miles, in so intricate a maze of slippery, dark passages, investigation is not only a matter of days, but a very dangerous exploit, if the explorers are not careful to supply themselves with all the appliances necessary to cave-exploring —ropes, torches, ladders, compass—and to insure a means of retracing their steps.

The hypothesis seems well founded that the mines were worked by Romans,[1] though it is not impossible that later exploiters had their trial at them. There is no gold in them, however, but only an argentiferous lead ore.[2] The gold mined at Courmayeur was, according to all probability, washed from the sands of the Dora and other torrents descending from the range of the Mont Blanc.[3]

Cogne also had its mines: even in Roman times its *ferri fodinæ* (iron mines) were well known.

In the neighbourhood of Fénis, at the opening of the gulch of Clavalité, there rises an enormous pile, a veritable hill, now covered with grass and trees, of scoria and other refuse from ancient copper mines. The shaft and tunnels of the mines, as well as the ruins of the smelters, can be found not

[1] Robilant.
[2] Galena—lead 60%, silver 0.17%.
[3] Strabo, lib. iv., cap. 6, § 7 (vol. i., page 322).

far away. This waste material, which still contains a noticeable amount of copper—sufficient, perhaps, to make worth while the reduction of it by modern means,—is at present being used to macadamize the road between Châtillon and Aosta, so that any one who would examine it without taking the trouble of going to Clavalité, may help himself to free specimens from the mounds by the roadside, awaiting distribution.

We already mentioned Eporedia, the important trade and industrial centre that preceded Ivrea, in the glacial amphitheatre at the opening of Val d' Aosta; and its *amphora* factories and the many finds of rare and unusual coins. Something else worth seeing could the *Eporedienses* show off, had they a mind to. At the confines of the town, the river Dora flows through a very narrow gorge, once no more than sixty or seventy feet wide. When the freshets came, with the melting of the snow and ice in the mountains, the rushing waters, held back in the narrow gorge, used to overflow and spread out over the land above the city. To avoid this trouble, self-renewed every spring, the Romans broadened the gorge by hewing away the solid rock on one side, thus at least doubling the width of the passage. A modern bridge,

thrown across the gorge where an old Roman bridge once stood, affords a fine view of the cut, which extends as far down below the level of low water as a man could reach; at that point, the rock left uncut projects into the stream like a broad shelf. The work done by the Romans is yet adequate to relieve the situation for which it was intended.

The coins, inscriptions, and more precious findings from the Ivrean excavations are stored in the museum of the town, known by the name of *Museo Garda;* it is small, but exceedingly valuable and carefully kept. The visitor must first go to the city hall to get a permit and the key; after this formality, in the custody of a policeman specially delegated for the purpose, he may enter its seldom-opened doors.

The museum is largely filled with Japanese bronzes, porcelains, and lacquered goods of the end of the eighteenth century, presented to the town by one of its citizens, Signor Garda, who lived in Japan for thirty years, at the beginning of the nineteenth century—a collection that contains what are said to be wonderful specimens of a period when Japanese art was at its highest.

The museum contains also—a matter of more interest to us at this moment—some Roman antiquities, chief among them the tombstone, six

and a half feet by three, of yellowish marble, of Æbutius Faustus, surveyor; a very rare document for the history of science, as it supplies a design of the Roman surveying instrument, the *groma*. At long intervals, students of Roman antiquities come from afar to view this remarkable stone of the museum of Ivrea: officials in the town hall still remember the time when Mommsen's assistant came all the way from Berlin on purpose to make a cast of it. The modern *Eporedienses* surely cannot be accused of exploiting their relics, or of trying to make so much of their *lapis* as their Danish contemporaries do with their runic stones —not so old by a thousand years!

The *groma* is the fundamental instrument of Roman surveying, having the function exactly to describe a right angle and to determine a vertical plane. While it is frequently mentioned in all the works of Roman *mensores* (surveyors), none of them has given a sufficiently clear description of it to make evident the exact manner of its use; moreover, no picture of it in ancient manuscript came to view to help the matter out. Students that had attempted to unravel the mystery were therefore left to conjectures—that is, to very unsafe philosophical proceeding, when it comes to reconstructing a mathematical instrument.

When the stone of Æbutius in Ivrea came to light, there was offered the direct means of ascertaining the shape of the *groma*—even though the representation of a marble bas-relief may be somewhat inexact. With the help of the bas-relief and the instructions given by Nipsus[1]—the most detailed at our disposal—a model of the ancient *groma* was constructed, successfully tried, and even declared more reliable than its modern equivalent.[2]

The inscription, only the wording of which is to be found in Mommsen,[3] reads as follows:

IB. CLAVDIA
AEBVTIVS. L. L
AVSTVS. MENSOR
VĪ' VIR ❦ SIBI. ET
ARRIAE. Q. L. AVCTAE
VXORI. F. T. SVIS. ET
ZEPYRE ❦ LIBERT
V F

Supplying the parts wanting, and expanding the abbreviations, gives the inscription thus, complete:

[1] M. J. Nipsus, lib. ii., *Limitis repositio*, in *Die Schriften der Röm. Feldmesser*, vol. i., pages 286 *et seq.*

[2] Legnazzi, pages 106 *et seq.* Deposited in the laboratory of practical geometry and surveying, of the University of Padua.

[3] Mommsen (*Corpus*), No. 6786.

TRIBV. CLAVDIA
LVCIVS. AEBVTIVS. LVCII. LIBERTVS
FAVSTVS. MENSOR
SEVIR. SIBI. ET
ARRIAE. QVINTI. LIBERTAE. AVCTAE
VXORI. ET. SVIS. ET
ZEPYRE. LIBERTAE
VIVVS FECIT

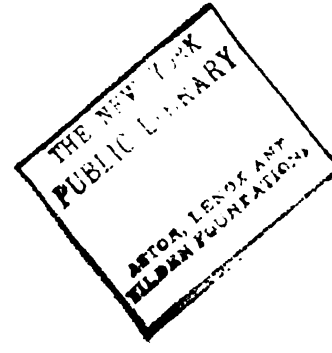
The inscription, translated, reads:

Lucius Æbutius Faustus, a freedman of Lucius, Claudian tribe,—Surveyor, City commissioner—To himself and to his wife, Arria Aucta, a freedwoman of Quintus, and to his (children), and to Zepyra, his freedwoman—erected (this stone) while alive.

This *mensor* must have been a precise man, and at the same time of a vain turn of mind. His tomb already prepared, he had it inscribed while he was yet alive, remembering in the inscription all his family, his offices and social distinctions; and finally had figured there the insignia of his dignity and the chief tool of his business. Like many another man, he meant only to perpetuate the memory of his name—of uncertain value—but unwittingly he rendered a great service to the students of later centuries, who, caring little about his name but much about his stone, are thankful for the pains taken by his minute and petty vanity.

The photograph here reproduced is, to our knowledge, the only one of the lapis in existence.

The Tombstone of the Surveyor
L. Aebutius Faustus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Part III

In the Duché d'Aoste

CHAPTER I

FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE TO THE KINGDOM OF ITALY[1]

THE early mediæval history of the valley of Aosta offers little of actual interest. Like all the rest of Europe, groping in the general disorder for an identity of its own, the valley was dragged by events into community with a number of strange lands, and into a series of changes hard to follow through the painful lack of records. The absence of unity and the extreme rarity of personalities of commanding prominence make the whole history of the Dark Ages dreary and lagging; and our little corner of the world did not escape the fate of the rest.

After the settling of the Burgundians in Southern France, already mentioned,[2] Aosta to a great extent partook of the rising and falling fortunes of that Gothic stock, one of the first to migrate from

[1] Authorities for the historical data concerning the valley of Aosta, contained in this chapter, are, when not otherwise stated, De Tillet and Guichenon.

[2] See part ii., chap. 3, page 168.

Germany and one of the promptest in thoroughly absorbing Latin ways and customs. Incidentally, we have vague notice of the valley's coming under the jurisdiction of the monastery of St. Maurice (Valais),[1] under the bishops of Aosta, then again, under the Burgundian kings: Gontran (561 A. D.), whom the Roman Church has sanctified, is remembered by the clergy as the restorer of the cathedral of Aosta,[2] and by the city in a street named after him. Later, the Burgundians sink in the shadow of the Frankish kingdoms, though they remain in their adopted country undisturbed.

During the period of the kingdom of Charlemagne, there ruled as bishop of Aosta, the holy Grato, a pious man for whom the gratitude of the Aostans was such that they chose him to the honourable position of patron saint, and still guard his relics in a massive silver casket, occasionally carrying them around in procession, when some practical benefit is desired of his influential authority.

[1] According to a charter, mentioned by Aubert, page 16.

[2] A tablet in the cathedral reads as follows:

"Quinto Kl. Aprilis

Eodem die apud Cabilonē civitatē Galliarū, Depositio B̄ti Gondranni Regis Aurelianensis, filii Clotharii I, Regis Frācorū, Instauratoris huī ecclīe." (The fifth day of the Kalends of April, the same day (*took place*) the interment in the city of Chalons, of Gondran, King of Orléans, son of Clothair I, King of the Franks, restorer of this church.)

By the beginning of the eleventh century, we find the valley of Aosta connected with the domains of the counts of Maurienne, soon afterward, through imperial investiture becoming imperial counts (Reichsgrafen) of Savoy: later still dukes of Savoy, kings of Sardinia, kings of Italy.

During the first seven centuries that followed the final crash of the Western Roman Empire, there is probably but one single period that is of real live interest in the history of Val d'Aosta, although the chronicles are no more generous with information about it than about others: it is the time of the Saracenic and Hungarian invasions.

The valley, thanks to its situation, sequestered from the main directions of the barbaric movements, seems to have been spared almost entirely the hardship of the invasions, which upset all the rest of Europe from the fifth to the ninth century after Christ. The Burgundians had taken up permanent quarters in it, while the Roman authority, though tottering, was still to be felt, and from the Roman emperor they received authorisation for their settlements: after that, the valley was apparently left to enjoy a lonely lot, good or bad as it may have been, for a long time. It was not until the middle of the ninth century

that the storm of foreign marauders struck the region—and with a severity that probably made up for past escape. But the storm came from utterly different directions than the northern moors and the forests of Germany: it raged from the south and the east, from the once blooming shores of Africa and the remote mystery-darkened fastnesses of Scythia: it came with the Saracens and the Hungarians.

This is not the place to go much into the details of the Saracenic invasions of Western Europe. For our purpose, it suffices to say that the legends woven by the monkish prejudice and fanaticism of the Dark Ages around the Saracens, have done a great deal of injustice alike to historical truth and to Saracenic habits.

It is generally stated that Abderrahman, having invaded France from Spain with an immense horde of Arabs, sacked and pillaged and devastated the country with such ferocity that the cry of anguish of the tormented population roused the ire of the young Frankish king, Charles Martel, and that he gathered a large army, met Abderrahman near Tours, killed him and crushed his army, saving Europe for ever from the shame of the Moslem.[1]

This presentation of facts is quite epic, but a bit

[1] Creasy, chap. vii.

too fanciful. Though it sound "uncharitable," it must be stated that the Saracens—as their great achievements in Spain amply prove—were not such beasts as they are made out to be; and more than likely did not devastate everything within reach: in the conquest of France they were moved, as in the conquest of Spain, by the desire of proselyting new peoples and finding new homes—in other words, of settling in new countries, like the northern invaders, with the added motive of religion. Strange tactics indeed would they be—those of a people, who, as a first act of settlement would destroy all the resources of their new homeland, all houses, all food-supplies, all plantations, leaving nothing else for themselves but the necessity of importing even the grain for their bread and the cattle for their meat! The sacking done by the Saracens must obviously be interpreted as the appropriation of gold and silver and weapons; their devastating, as the destruction of those who offered resistance—two privileges largely and reiteratedly indulged in by the Christian invaders of the Roman provinces.

Charles Martel, who, by the way, was not exactly a youthful hero,[1] did not hasten to meet Abderrahman, but let him occupy a goodly portion

[1] Being born no later than 688, he was at least 44 in 732.

of France (more than half), and, according to some historians, remain in it for several years,[1] as, at the time, he was too busy with Christian enemies of his own blood to bother with the infidels. Once Suevians and Frisians and Saxons were disposed of, he turned his mind to the other side and beat back the Arabs. These, however, were not destroyed, nor altogether chased out of France, for they remained in their mountainous districts on both sides of the Rhone.[2] With the help of a new body of their kind, freshly come from Spain,[3] only seven years after the great battle of Tours, these Saracens again became so menacing that Charles Martel had to face them a second time and succeeded in restraining them only with the help of Luitprand, King of the Longobards.[4]

Nor did that put an end to their activities in Southern Europe outside of Spain. They were

[1] Bertolini, page 235.

[2] *Encyclopédie*, Chev. de Jaucourt, in article "*Sarrasins.*"

[3] Bertolini, page 214.

[4] See the epitaph on the sarcophagus of Luitprand, in the church of S. Peter in Coelo Aureo, in Pavia:

. . . . . .

"Deinceps tremuere feroces
Atque Saraceni quos dispulit impiger ipso
Cum premerent Gallos, Carolo poscente juvari."

("And then trembled the fierce Saracens, whom he speedily routed, when they threatened the Gauls, Charles himself having asked his aid.")—*ex* Bertolini, page 214, note.

occupying Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, and part of Southern Italy. In 846 they laid siege to Rome, raising it after beating a Frankish army of succour only because while they were dealing their side blow to the Franks, the Romans had time to gather in troops, supplies, and ammunition, and to strengthen the city so as to make its capture a hopeless enterprise for the besiegers.[1]

Meanwhile, a new scourge appeared in Northern Italy, the incursions of the Hungarians, heralded by so much terror among the fearful population that special prayers were offered to the saints to keep them off.[2] How they reached the valley of Aosta

[1] *Encyclopédie*, article by de Jaucourt, already quoted.

[2] In Modena, the following special prayer was offered to S. Gemignano, at the end of the ninth century:

"Confessor Christi, pie Dei famule,
O Geminiane, exorando supplico
Ut hoc flagellum, quod meremor miseri
Coelorum Regis evadamus gratia.
Nam doctus eras Attilae temporibus
Portas pandendo liberare subditos
Nunc te rogamus, licet servi pessimi,
Ab Ungerorum nos defendas jaculis."

("O Confessor of Christ, pious servant of God, O Gemignano, praying I beseech thee, that we may by the Grace of Heaven's King escape this scourge, from which we suffer. Since thou wast instructed how to free thy subjects, at the time of Attila, opening the gates, we ask thee, though we be very evil servants, to defend us from the arrows of the Hungarians.")—*ex* Muratori (*Antiq.*), vol. i, page 7.

is not known: whether they approached from the east over the plains, or over the mountains from the west, their swoop through the region must have been a deadly one, since, according to a chronicler of the time, they razed the city of Aosta to the ground, and for many years left the whole valley almost without inhabitants.[1]

The Hungarians were hardly gone, when trouble with the Saracens began again. It was only in 915 that Berenger, King of Italy, succeeded in routing them out of their strongholds in Southern Italy, and in the beginning of the eleventh century that the Normans put an end to their dominion in Sicily. From their safe retreats in the islands, expeditions of Saracens constantly harassed the coasts of the Mediterranean and made incursions inland—by the tenth century, however, as bandits, no longer as *Völker in Wanderung*.

In the tenth century they landed in Frassinetto, near Nice,[2] doubtless in many expeditions; aided probably by the Saracens that still lived in Provence, they took to the mountains and spread north till they reached the valley of Aosta. All

[1] Berard, page 145–146.

[2] *Chron. Novaliciensis*, lib. iv, fragment (vol. ii, 2d part; page 730)—Luitprand, lib. i, cap. i (vol. ii, 1st part; page 425). Mentioned also in the Acts of St. Romolo, bishop of Genoa (Gioffredo, 285, 286 *et seq.*).

the passes of the western Alps, during the second part of the ninth and the first part of the tenth century, were in their hands, and communications between France and Italy became not only difficult, but actually dangerous.[1] In 921–923 a whole procession of English pilgrims were stoned to death by the bandits, while on its way to Rome through the Montcenis: they were also accused of the assassination of the archbishop of Tours, who ventured into the mountains on a similar errand.

The Saracens of the Grand St. Bernard, as well as those in other parts of the Alps, appear as abettors—if not exactly allies—of Hugo of Provence in his struggle for the crown of Italy against Berenger and other competitors.[2] The desperation of the Valdostans, and the courageous leadership of Bernard of Mentone (St. Bernard), finally succeeded in ridding the valley of the brigands, once for always: so closing the bloodiest epoch of its history, and at the same time the most singular.

As one sign of their long dominion in the Alps, the Saracens left among the ruins on the pass of the Grand St. Bernard a number of coins with the typical cufic characters of the old Arabic writing[3]:

[1] *Chron. Novaliciensis, loc. cit.*

[2] Luitprand, lib. i, cap. 7 (vol. ii, 2d part; page 464).

[3] See reproductions of such writing in *Acts of the Paleographical Society of London*—Oriental Series.

these are now in the little museum of the hospice. The inhabitants of the Swiss valleys of Anniviers, Evolena and Tourtemagne—valleys extending from the main Alpine ridge to the Rhone—are notably different from the people either of Val d'Aosta or canton Valais. Their dialect cannot be connected with any neighbouring languages, nor does their appearance resemble that of any adjacent stock: their manners, gruff and inhospitable, are strange to the region. Obstinately independent, they resisted Napoleon's army vigorously. Some authors derive them from old Celtic or Hunnish origin; others think them Saracen.

With hard facts to teach them, it did not take long for the petty lords in Val d' Aosta to learn the necessity of building strong places to protect themselves and their property. So began, about the time of the Hungarian and Saracenic raidings, the erection of the first castles of the valley: meanwhile, all around, nature went wild with neglect; the forests grew thick and became infested with bears and wolves; the highroads fell out of repair, and the great works of the Romans began to pay for the poverty and incapacity of later times.

The first buildings to be adapted to the use of

mediæval strongholds were the wall towers of the city of Aosta: then other small keeps arose all through the valley, poorly built, in most cases with the help of material stolen from Roman structures. The remains of this age are few; since generally its strongholds were afterwards remodelled, enlarged, or altogether rebuilt: where left to themselves, they fell to pieces.

Probably the most remarkable remains of this epoch are those of the castle of Graines, high in the side-valley of Challant-Ayas, perched on a cliff a thousand feet up, alone, facing the glaring snow-banks of the Becca di Torché and Becca di Frudiera. The gleam from the white surface of the snow is so blinding in the sunshine that, according to tradition, the peasants of the valley had foisted upon them, as an obligatory feudal service, the annual carrying and dumping of a certain amount of dirt on the snow, that the fair eyes of the tender chatelaines might not be injured or their delicate skins burned.

Whether the people at large gained much by the change from Hungarian and Saracen harassers to those of their own kind, is at least open to question: certainly rebellions were numerous in those days, and many a vassal had to be forced by his suzerain to treat his subjects and the travellers

who had the misfortune to pass through his borders[1] with a measurable degree of humanity. Better times, however, came for the valley, as for the rest of the world, with the first gleamings of new light that dawned over Europe, weary of disorder, in the thirteenth century.

In 1238, Emperor Frederic II made the valley into a duchy and invested the counts of Savoy with the fief, thereby giving them formally the general overlordship that already belonged to them practically. The duchy and the counts went ever thereafter together through time, united, as in marriage, for better or for worse; the duchy developing a strong attachment to the house of Savoy—later proved in trying circumstances,—the house of Savoy showing always a considerate, though sometimes somewhat reluctant, regard for the special privileges of the duchy; and though the duchy has disappeared and the counts have become kings of a great nation, the two partners to the covenant of 1238 still go on together, still united by a singular bond of devotion and friendliness. There is probably only one feeling in the Valdostans that is as strong as their attachment to the house of Savoy, if not stronger, and that is their fidelity to the Church. Yet neither senti-

[1] See chap. iv., pages 274–6, for the story of the Bard family

ment was ever so blind that they let their rightful dues and liberties be lightly overlooked.

During the centuries when the feudal system was at its height—from the eleventh to the sixteenth century—the vassals of the valley of Aosta, as well as elsewhere, grew so powerful that they could afford to treat their overlord with perhaps an excessive degree of indifference—excessive, of course, from the overlord's point of view. To keep matters in a happy medium course and avoid chances for open breaks, the counts of Savoy had recourse to a political stratagem: from time to time, as occasion arose, they granted by sovereign charters various privileges to the free peasantry, and through their courts saw to it that the privileges were faithfully respected by the vassals. So the free peasantry rose slowly and almost imperceptibly to a position of political power quite rare for those times, and which, in certain ways, could be considered remarkable even in these days of democratic institutions.

The duchy had its assembly, made up of representatives of the three estates, which convened in Aosta any time there was need of passing upon moneys to be paid to the state. The duchy was, from ancient concession, free from any regular

contribution that might be compared to the modern arrangement of taxes: instead, it agreed to pay every year a "donation" to the lord of Savoy, and, when special needs required, to add to the yearly present an "extraordinary donation," to be determined upon, according to the demands of that prince. In both cases, the assent of the assembly was necessary before the officers of the counts or dukes or of their vassals could proceed to levy the duties. The suzerain was obliged to come to Aosta from his capital of Chambéry at least once every seven years, to preside over a session of the assembly and hold court of justice, giving a hearing to anyone who had grievances to present. He used to come over the Petit St. Bernard with brilliant pageant, was received at the gates of Aosta by the bishop and lodged in the bishop's residence: at the same time, a number of envoys took nominal possession in his name of all the castles of the valley by receiving their keys. The solemn sessions of the assembly were held in the bishop's great hall,—which was destroyed by fire in 1670[1]; and the barons were obliged to be present, as well as the delegates of the clergy and of the freemen.

In the assembly, since the barons and the clergy

[1] Aubert, page 29.

were often at odds, it was to the representatives of the free peasantry that the casting vote fell. Soon, nevertheless,—privileged as the situation might already seem,—the assembly was not deemed sufficient, the periods of adjournment were too long; and from the assembly there was elected a so-called "Conseil des Commis," or council of delegates, which was nothing other than a small parliament in permanent session, called together at a moment's notice for any adequate reason. Finally, to complete the picture of the free government of the Valdostans, any time either assembly or council could not come to a conclusion in some matter, the decision was left to a referendum vote of the freemen of the valley: the intervention of this form of direct legislation was in fact so omnipotent that on some occasions it was adopted to override measures that the council had couched in definite form and already passed upon.

Documents of 1681 speak of a session of the assembly that had decided on an "extraordinary donation" of a hundred and twenty thousand *livres* (somewhat under thirty thousand dollars, or six thousand pounds), thus answering with a cut-down the duke's request for a hundred and eighty thousand livres. The documents further

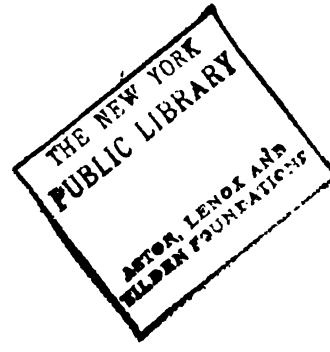
reveal how the people of some communities in the valley rebelled at the idea of even a hundred and twenty thousand, and held meetings, their leaders making demonstration by fiery speeches in the very hall of the assembly, after the turbulent fashion of modern times. The bailiff of Aosta (or ducal governor, who was, ex-officio, chairman of the assembly and member of the council, without right of vote in either) was thereupon satisfied, and probably glad, to accept a hundred and twelve thousand, instead of the hundred and twenty thousand first voted.[1]

In 1696 and in 1760 we find again a conflict between the supreme authority and the council, concerning the size of an "extraordinary donation"; but this time the people took the part of the suzerain, and raised the sum allowed by the council from four hundred and twenty thousand to five hundred thousand in the first case, and from three hundred and eighty thousand to four hundred and ten thousand, in the second.[2]

The power of the assembly, which had been fostered by the counts of Savoy to keep in check the independence of the counts of Challant, of Avise, of Vallesa, of Sarriod, and of a small host of

[1] Perrero. [2] Perrero.

The Entrance to the Keep, Castle of Fénis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other vassals, probably grew obnoxious to the dukes of Savoy, when feudalism began to weaken before the rising monarchical authority; and still more so must have been the council, which had arrogated to itself legislative authority. Furthermore, when the power of the feudal lords was curbed and the popular privileges had lost their original ducal import, the suzerains found that the independent mountaineers had taken a great liking to them on their own account and were not at all ready to relinquish them. So there began a campaign of subtlety on the part of the dukes of Savoy, then kings of Sardinia, against the Valdostan franchises, which finally closed in the abolition of both assembly and council, in 1772, after an honourable career of many centuries,—one of the few instances, outside of cities, of a mediæval semi-democratic government that held out for a long period of time.

The origin of the free institutions of the valley lay in the desire of the overlord to use the people as a counterweight to the vassal's own strength, and not in any special wish to allow all classes of citizens to share in a régime, of which all were to bear the weight: but the custody of these institutions did not here rest with civic and industrial

corporations, but in the wide-awake interest of the individual peasants and their leaders in public affairs, in their independence of character. In reading the accounts of Valdostan affairs of three and four hundred years ago, one experiences a keen delight, akin to one's joy in the fresh touch of a summer morning breeze: the affairs are, to be sure, quite inconsequent to us and sometimes quite trifling in themselves; but the spirit of public life that made these mountaineers decide one way or another, the active strife of parties, the open discussion of arguments, the free course of the opposition, and the appearing of the tumultuous plebs as final judge in all things, put a highly desirable note, fresh and new, into the recital of wars that kept Europe in uproar for years over the succession to a throne, of mad squanderings of wealth and life by kings and princes, of events from which the people, the part that works, thinks, and pays, seemed to have completely vanished.

This independence of character saved the Valdostans from many an obnoxious innovation, in religion as well as in politics. Always devoted Roman Catholics, when the opportunity offered, they stood for the Church of Rome, alike against the new reform of Calvin,[1] and the old reform of

[1] See chap. v, pages 312–317.

the Waldenses.[1] Perhaps we ought to say, rather than by the Church of Rome, the Valdostans stood by the Church of Aosta, which happens to be a part of the Church of Rome: for their feeling of loyalty to their valley is beyond the power of man to shake, and the Church, as we saw in another part of this work,[2] is of a strictly local type, through birth of priesthood, character of traditions, and native connections with holy protectors, like San Grato. Just as vigorously as they stood by the Church, they resisted any attempt on its part to meddle from the outside too intimately with their local affairs, political and spiritual.

They persistently kept off the Jesuits, whom with serene impartiality they decreed as unwelcome as the Protestants; and as persistently and successfully they refused admittance to the Inquisition. In 1714, the oft-repelled Inquisition tried to creep into the valley by sending to Aosta a prelate, who styled himself "Vicar-general of the Holy Office in the Duchy of Aosta," and on the authority of the bishop of Vercelli, distributed a papal bull condemning several books, with the request that the mandate be obeyed: a strong

[1] See chap. iv, pages 284–294.
[2] See part i, chap. ii, pages 37-38.

rebuff was at once returned. In an address to the king, the Valdostans remind him that the title of "Vicar," etc., is contrary to truth and prejudicial to the franchises and customs of their province; that the Duchy recognises no other judge of first instance in these matters of faith and doctrine than its bishop; that the Inquisition has never been accepted by them, and its officers have no jurisdiction over them[1]: after which the inquisitor packed his belongings and withdrew.

The authoritative history of the valley has been, on the whole, relatively uneventful: the lords ruled benignly, and probably none of the disturbances in the region deserves the name of revolt, still less of revolution. No struggles took place among the various lords, aside from a few relatively insignificant quarrels over the succession; none, aside from the legitimate suzerain, ever coveted permanent possession of the valley; and even though it was, at long intervals, invaded by French troops and held temporarily during the wars stirred up by the insatiable ambition and restlessness of Louis XIV, by the French Revolution, and by Napoleon, one can hardly say that its long enjoyment of peace was interfered with.

[1] Perrero, note on first page.

In 1691 the French army did do some ravaging: the cathedral of Aosta was saved from pillage only by the presence of mind of one its canons, who persuaded the officers that a church restored and protected by a French king like Gontran, could not be sacked by French soldiers: and the Burgundian Gontran, though his relation to "Le Roi Soleil" was rather distant, succeeded in warding off the danger. The ragged soldiery of the Revolution also committed excesses, but when we compare these invasions with the endless afflictions from which the rest of Italy and most of Europe suffered for centuries, we must allow that the trouble was slight indeed. Far more serious than the march of any warring host was the plague of 1630: that killed sixty thousand persons in the valley—three quarters of the population.[1]

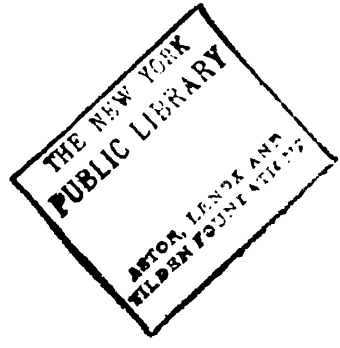
If the valley was relatively so peaceful, why then should it have so many castles, so many menacing, overbearingly war-like strongholds? Seeing the ruins of perhaps a hundred castles in a stretch of country possibly fifty miles long by ten wide, would lead one to imagine that the place was in a continuous state of uproar and that the peasantry must have had a hard time of it, not to mention travellers or merchants, journeying

[1] Aubert, page 32.

through it, who must have feared a big robber in every lord and a petty one in each of his subjects. This would be a wrong inference. The valley was tranquil enough: the people were well off for the times, and travellers and merchants, aside from the transit tolls they had to pay, suffered no frequent difficulty; for the dukes of Savoy, through their bailiffs, were very careful to keep this important international highway well patrolled by police.

The reason why the castles are so numerous is to be found in the landlords' own disregard—this also a fact peculiar to the independent valley—for the feudal laws. The feudal régime had for its fundamental basis the law of entail, a law considered so cardinal a principle of feudalism that the first action taken by modern régimes to guarantee themselves against a resurrection of that dreaded system, was to compel the equal, or nearly equal, division of heredities among all direct heirs, and to sanction the legal right of any child to claim an even share of his father's estate. This essential feudal principle, the lords of the valley of Aosta quite often ignored, sometimes to their own disadvantage and that of their family, either by choosing a son other than the eldest as heir of the fief, allotting generous shares to the others to keep

The Castle of Ussel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them quiet, or by dividing the estates equally among all, or even by calling a daughter into possession.

The consequences of this proceeding were manifold. Some families by too much division so diminished their resources that they were unable to maintain a sufficiently lordly style of living, went into debt, and finally lost their holdings. So the ruling power concentrated itself, little by little, into the hands of two or three families; and these, by transmitting their fiefs to the ablest, rather than invariably to the first-born, increased their wealth and consolidated their power to the point where they could consider themselves as almost independent of the overlord. In these families, every heir, feeling himself as important as any of his brothers or sisters and as rich, and not wanting to leave the region, or to live in the old castle, built a new one for himself in that part of the domains allotted to him.

So rose castles everywhere, and most of them were, in the style of the time, quite redoubtable in appearance; but the majority of them never saw the gleam of a sword, except in peaceful salute, or heard the clang of arms, except in joust and tourney. In fact, Issogne, the most attractive and best preserved of them all, is more like a large

country house than a castle; it has no walls of defence, no towers, no drawbridge, no window-slits, no watch-walks, no merlons: a single oak door shuts it off from the street of its village, and nobody has ever tried to enter it without first giving with its knocker friendly notice of his intentions.

In this temperate political arrangement, the centuries passed quietly through the valley without any notable clash: the lords got on with the people and the people got on with the lords. When the fierce storm of the French Revolution broke out and swept its destructive fury from France into Spain and Italy and the Low Countries and Germany, it found the inhabitants of the Val d'Aosta ready for a change, but with no hate in their hearts, no vengeance in their wills. They did not rise in revolt; they did not pillage and destroy. The life of the ancient vassal families continued undisturbed, as long, at least, as they were able to maintain it. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, many of them were, however, already extinct or had come to the verge of poverty.

When, for lack of means, the castles could no longer be held, they were abandoned: in those

times no one would—or perhaps could!—buy. They were abandoned and then decayed, as things abandoned do. Some of them fell to pieces because of poor construction; into others the humble crept, taking possession after the powerful had disappeared, and baronial halls became hay-barns and stables for cattle. Some of the castles, too proud and strong to crumble, too inaccessible for peasant use, stood, stripped of all movable glory, waiting for more appreciative times to come and care for them. Those that fell to dust died the natural death of old age; but many are not dead, even though they are no longer of service; resting where once they ruled, in the fulness of wealth and power, the villages that now rule themselves, they seem like the old folk in a young house—the young people take care of them, admire them, and listen eagerly to their stories of the past. This is what gives to the castles of the valley a certain "atmosphere" that is wanting about many other ruined castles of by-gone centuries.

The valley and its people are not so backward in customs and appearance that they better suit the age of castle-building than they do our own. Their conditions are progressing, although slowly, as conditions in mountainous districts always do.

The valley is passing through modern times as it went through the middle ages, at a comfortable rate, with no serious crises to bring it shuddering memories, no great events to over-elate it: there seems to be no sharp division between the period of their castles' prime and the present, no blood-filled chasm, no long-drawn struggles, no outbursts of purblind rage. Instead, rather, the villagers cherish the memory of their castle and its owners —rare and happy people, who have no need to regard the relics of their past as monuments of suffering and oppression!—and almost every village has one castle, sometimes more than one, within its limits.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF CHALLANT

THE story of the family of Challant is a story of uninterrupted success and progress toward power and wealth. The first member of the house to appear in history is Bozone, a simple governor of the town of Aosta, under the rule of the counts of Savoy: his position was honoured by the title of viscount. Bozone and his son Aimone must have been deserving vassals, since Bozone II., son of Aimone, was invested by his suzerain in 1200, with the hereditary fief of Challant, covering part of the valley of Challant-Ayas, and with the title of count. From that moment, the increase of dominions was so constant, and the part played in the politics of Val d' Aosta and Savoy so important, that one may regard the history of Piedmont between the thirteenth and the seventeenth century as practically identified with that of the house of Challant.

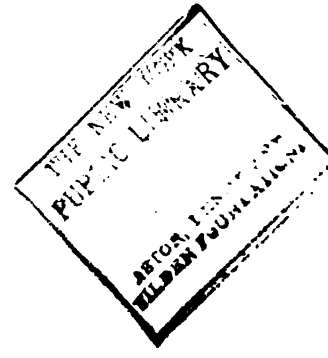
Bozone III., the son of Bozone II., added to his

tenure the fiefs of Châtillon and Cly; Gottofredo, his son, in 1263 acquired the fiefs of Graines and Fénis; Ebalo the Great extended his rule to include St. Marcel, Ussel, and Montjovet; Ibleto the greatest scion of the family, acquired the domain of St. Vincent, Verrès, Châtel-Argent, Issogne. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the house of Challant controlled the whole of the lower valley, from Pont St. Martin almost to the gates of Aosta, beside holding several fiefs in the upper valley—like Aimaville—as well as that of Vallengin in the Valais, of Andorno in the Biellese district, and smaller fees, scattered in different parts of Savoy, Piedmont, and Switzerland.

To give an idea of the power of the family, we need only register the positions of prominence that they held throughout their connection at any given moment of their history. Let us take, for instance, the first years of the fifteenth century, when Ibleto's life was drawing near its end. At that time[1] the head of the house was lord of the fiefs already mentioned, chatelain of Ivrea, bailiff of Susa, general and ambassador to Milan for Amedeo VI., count of Savoy, and ambassador to the duke of Burgundy for Amedeo VII. Among his cousins of the branch of Fénis-Ussel, there was

[1] Vaccarone (*Challants*), 3d and 5th table.

The Castle of Fénis (1330 A.D.)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a chatelain of Anniviers, a lady-in-waiting to the countess of Savoy, a cardinal papal nuncio to France, a bishop of Lausanne, a bishop of Geneva, a governor of Piedmont, a chatelain of Tourbillon, the curés of St. Vincent and Brusson; among his cousins of the branch of Aimaville, there was a chatelain of Santhia and eight more places, a bailiff of Chablais and Tarantaise.

During the sixteenth century, when Renato headed the family, while he, or some of his near relatives controlled all the fees already mentioned, two other of his relatives were in charge of the priories of St. Ours in Aosta and St. Gilles in Verrès; one was archdeacon of the cathedral of Aosta; and through marriage, Renato's daughter was dictating in the affairs of Trent.

As the power and dominions of the family spread, the number of castles built by them increased. Aimone built Fénis in 1330; Ibleto the Young, a cousin of the great Ibleto, built Ussel in 1350; Bonifacio built Cly in 1351; Aimone built Aimaville in 1354; Ibleto the Great built Verrès in 1390; in 1410, another member of the family built the castle of Châtillon; Giorgio built the manor-house of Issogne in 1470.

Before describing all these abodes of the various

Challants, we show but proper respect for the family memories in turning first to the original castle of Challant, the simpler and more modest dwelling from which the fortunes of the house took their start. It was not built by a Challant, but given to the family by the counts of Savoy: Ebalo the Great was the first of his line to occupy it, moving in, in 1295. By the middle of the next century, the counts of Challant had already moved out of it: their dominions, extending into the main valley north and south of Verrès, obliged them to live in places more easily accessible than this solitary eyrie, up the secondary valley of the Évançon, built on a high bluff like its companion of Graines, and like it belonging to the ancient set of eleventh-century robber nests.

The family of Challant, not unlike other human beings that have climbed to great fortune and high station, cared little for their old haunts, and after building in the main valley of Aosta, soon left the castle of Challant, as well as that of Graines almost, if not quite, alone to their fate. Only poorer or less desirable members of the family had the questionable privilege of using the falling properties, which occasionally also served as military bases during family feuds. Of the castle of Challant there remain a few ruins, with a tower,

not far from the hamlet of Villa: noteworthy are two walls, eighty and ninety feet high, and a subterranean chamber carefully cemented all around, which was used, the historians say, as a reservoir—for wine!

The last time the castle of Challant came into prominence was during the middle of the fifteenth century, at the time of the death of Francesco, the son of the great Ibleto. Francesco left the fief to his daughters, Caterina and Margherita, in joint tenure. Other members of the family, headed by Giacomo, of the Aimaville branch, protested, and the duke of Savoy ordered Caterina to surrender the fief. Margherita, a peaceful girl, yielded to the pretender and gave up her claims; but Caterina was a figure that could well have a place of honour in the annals of feminism and woman's rights. Endowed with a most belligerent nature, she refused to surrender the holding, defied the authority of the suzerain, and withdrew to Challant while she was resisting his troops. The contest lasted almost fourteen years, with many alternations of fortune; it finally ended in 1456 in the capture and imprisonment of Caterina: Giacomo became the lawful incumbent of the fief.

The stormy career of Caterina, which, by the

way, she shared with three husbands, was far from over. The next year she was tried for sorcery, but acquitted and freed. Then her scheming and intriguing began again. In 1459 Giacomo died, leaving a little boy five years old. Caterina promptly set about to profit by the consequent, though temporary, weakness of Giacomo's line, and in 1462 reoccupied, *manu militari*, her former possessions. After much litigation, troops were again sent, in 1466, to evict her, though she does not seem to have felt any the worse for the new experience, since we find her again quarrelling with her relatives in 1469. Thereafter she disappears from history.[1]

Just here might also be mentioned the castle of Montjovet, as one of the oldest holdings of the house of Challant. This castle, also, the family entered as it stood—they were not yet builders then—at the end of the thirteenth century: it came to them by marriage and they held it until 1438, when Francesco, the father of Caterina and Margherita, sold it to the duke of Savoy to cancel some of his debts. Montjovet was used as a ducal fortress from that time until the middle of the seventeenth century, when it was abandoned. The ruins are very extensive, but too much dilapi-

[1] Vaccarone (*Valle*).

dated to allow of any clear ideal reconstruction of its plan and elevation.

The first of the great castles built by the counts of Challant was that of Fénis, and it is one of the most charming survivors to-day. As one nears it from the village, climbing the hill on which it stands, one passes by the roadside, a cross. The figure of the dying Christ, beautifully carved in wood, is browned by the weather, but has suffered no other injury through the five centuries since it was put up by some pious seignior. All the lords of the manor and their noble visitors have more or less reverently bowed the knee, as they passed it on the winding road; and there the wooden image still points out to the traveller the great pile which has long lost its inner life, though its outer form is perfectly preserved.

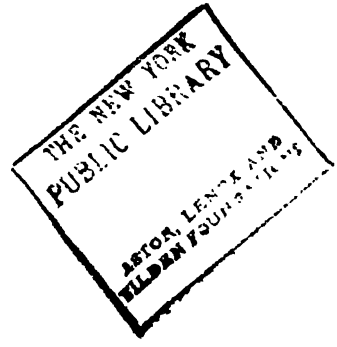
What a bold front shows the castle of Fénis! How impressive from afar, its many towers, crowned by battlements and topped by their original roofs—low-sloping caps, round or four-square! The big rectangular-mullioned windows seem hardly larger than the scaffold-holes that dot the broad expanse of its massive walls. But as one draws nearer, the bold and imperious front of the castle gradually disappears, giving place to

a much serener and more friendly look: the green pastures and chestnut groves that surround the grey old mass, make the picture charming, almost fairy-land.

Aimone must have been possessed of a very retiring nature: to enter his retreat, one must needs first go more than half way around the castle; for the entrance lies toward the mountains, just opposite the approach from the village. Once he has passed the portcullis of the gateway tower, the visitor realises that what seemed a single structure from afar, is really double; that a high wall with four towers surrounds the keep, or castle proper, separated from it by a narrow alley. To find the entrance to the keep, he must retrace his steps along two sides of this alley. So he reaches the entrance to the keep, a pretty pointed arch passage at the base of a small tower, with a new portcullis, a stone seat, and an oak door, which carries heavy bolts and an iron knocker.

When, after so many detours, he stands within, he wonders what has become of the magnificent size of the castle: a narrow, dark, triangular court, two wooden balconies running all round it at the height of the second and third stories, and a queer stone staircase, leading to the first balcony, are all that he sees of the great manor-house. The

The Stairway in the Court of the Castle of Fenis.
Fresco of St. George and the Dragon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size, so impressive from without, is lost in the passages. The owner must have felt as secluded as a worm in his cocoon—and as content.

The first, the ground, floor has store-rooms and rooms for soldiery, opening on the court; the second floor has the chapel and living rooms, opening on the balcony; the third story, bedrooms, also opening on the balcony. Most of the original, beamed ceilings are still in place, and most of the window sashes. The immense fireplaces, their handsome stone hoods finely carved, are in perfect condition. There are also the brackets of an outside balcony, overlooking the alley, an architectural relic of real value: balconies were not popular in castles mediæval, because they lent themselves to the aid of adventurous Romeos, and the lords were wont to be exceedingly jealous of their Juliets!

All is darkness within the castle, although, standing high and isolated on every side, its outer walls are bathed all day in the sunshine. The doors of the rooms open upon the gloomy court and the windows into the narrow alley, most of them having no other outlook than the blank wall before them. This want of light makes it difficult to inspect and appreciate the frescoes on the walls of the chapel and the court, which are for the most

part in admirable condition. Directly in front of the staircase there is a good St. George slaying the dragon: all around the second floor balcony, there are figures of men, representing sages of history, each holding a strip of parchment upon which is inscribed in Gothic types some sententious moral in French. The pictures belong to the end of the fourteenth century and show the fresh and ingenuous style of the pre-Renaissance paintings: they are most interesting artistic documents.

Even more interesting from a human standpoint are the numberless signatures, single words, and sentences that have been scratched upon the walls by inmates of the castle and their guests. Many of the signatures, of men famous in the history of Piedmont, are accompanied by dates as old as the second half of the 1300's: they bear witness to all the handwritings, languages, and spellings known during the life of the castle.

This habit of scratching things on the walls—things of use and things of no use—of making the wall both blackboard and confidante, was quite common among castle-dwellers, probably from scarcity of paper, and we shall find it again elsewhere than in Fénis. It sometimes reveals valuable and touching facts and half vindicates the

Two Figures among the Frescoes around the First Balcony, Castle of Fénis (A.D. 1330)

From a drawing by the author

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unruly desire of tourists visiting old monuments to record their presence. This inscription was left on the wall, evidently by a member of the family, or a friend: *Maneat domus donec formica æquor bibat et lenta testudo totum perambulet orbem*—(May this house stand till the ant has drunk the sea and the slow tortoise has travelled around the whole world)—a far-reaching wish, which threatened to come to naught, when the almost bankrupt Count Giorgio Francesco sold the castle in 1716 to a family that allowed it to be used as a farm-house; until, in 1895,[1] Francesco d' Andrade, advancing the sum necessary, purchased it for the State, and began to look after it with more care and interest.

Ussel is the phantom castle of Val d' Aosta. From far away, down and up the valley, one may see it against the sky, a crown on the head of a precipitous bluff that juts out from the mountain wall to the river. Everything about it is uncanny: the peculiarly blackish hue of the stone, the clumsy shape—a giant boulder—the rough, steep mountain slopes curving around it, the poor and forlorn village crouched in the hollow behind it, as if in fear of its damp, dark shadow. Yet if the

[1] Frutaz. The assignment was drawn on September 3, before the notary, J. B. Pignet of Aosta.

traveller walk at midday, or in the early afternoon, on the opposite side of the valley, along the high-road in the green and smiling plateau of St. Vincent, happy in its wealth of vineyards and chestnut groves, and turn his eyes toward the perch of Ussel, he will be almost startled to find that the castle has utterly vanished. When the light falls directly from above, and all contrasts of light and shade are lost in sunny haze, the castle sinks into the rock behind it and is gone. Only in the morning, when the sun falls on the castle and is shut off from the mountains behind by other irregular ridges, or toward evening, when the sunset rays strike the mountain-side, and no longer fall upon the castle, does it reappear; light against the dark background in the first case, dark against a light one in the second, sharply defining the bold outline of its échaugettes and naked walls.

Ussel, a bare donjon, never had any enclosing bailey-walls: it did not need them. With the precipice rising from the turbulent waters of the Dora to its base on three sides, and only a narrow approach on the fourth, a single path, steep and stony, leading to it—a long and weary way—nature had provided sufficient defence. Everything in it has fallen in, except the huge main walls. The blackberry grows in a wild tangle over the

heaped débris that fills the cellar almost to the level of the first floor. Now and then a stone comes flying down from the windy edge of a lofty parapet, to warn the visitor that danger lurks wherever the works of man crumble in abandonment. On the walls is yet to be seen the plaster of the three rooms that formed the second story, the outline of a large fireplace, and some stone seats flanking graceful, mullioned windows. There is no roof, and one looks up from dungeon and cellar to the luminous sky, as from the bottom of a tremendous well.

Cly is now a shapeless mound of débris around a square tower. Aimaville was rebuilt in the eighteenth century, and has become the country seat of a Genoese shipowner. Châtillon saw in 1802 the death of the last of the Challants and the consolation of his widow in a new marriage with Count Passerin d' Entrèves; then the castle was abandoned and fell into decay. The great-grandchildren of Count Passerin have rebuilt it in recent years for summer occupancy, and have gathered there a few of the movable possessions of the old Challant family—some furniture, some paintings, some precious manuscripts and books—almost all that was left of it besides its name.

The proudest holdings of the Challants were the castle of Verrès and the manor-house of Issogne, built in the same neighbourhood and in sight of each other: the first as a stronghold on a height above Verrès, dominating the main valley and closing the entrance to the side valley of Challant; the second as a residence, on the bottom of the main valley across the river.

Verrès is an extraordinarily powerful building, of admirable construction. It was originally only a square keep, having, like Ussel, no exterior walls. The progress of artillery, however, made it advantageous, two centuries or so later, to add an encircling wall; in this, a front gate, protected by a ruined drawbridge, and a small postern, now give access to the bailey and the donjon. The latter is beautifully preserved and would still keep off the rain with its own roof, had not the greed of a recent proprietor destroyed this to save the real estate taxes, which are not levied upon roofless walls. Now the castle has been acquired by the State and is being re-covered.

The plan of the keep was very simple: a square divided into nine smaller squares, of which the central one is occupied by a broad, winding staircase in vaulted sections, and the surrounding eight are bed- and living-rooms. Sometimes two

The Stairway in the Castle of Verrès (1390 A.D.)

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or three of these smaller squares are thrown into a large hall, as in the great guard-room on the first floor, and the dining-room on the second. The kitchen is interesting with its two enormous fireplaces and oven, each spacious enough for a whole ox. The size of the kitchen fireplaces in these castles suggests that the owners were men of most substantial and respectable appetite!

Verrès was not long used by the Challants as a residence: when Issogne was finished, ninety years later, Verrès was evacuated by the family and kept chiefly as a military stronghold. In an inventory of its contents,[1] made in 1566 by order of Countess Isabella, following the death of her father, Renato, not much beyond military supplies, weapons and ammunition, is to be found belonging to it: the archives of the house, later robbed and dispersed, were there, kitchen sundries, wine-making machinery, and all the old accumulations of a deserted house.

To show to what extent the home sense had fled from Verrès, we recall that the room once set aside for the safe-keeping of tapestries contained two silk hangings in tatters, four serge curtains, a cotton mattress, and—a number of pots, pans, and agricultural implements. Among the curiosi-

[1] Frutaz.

ties mentioned in the armory, there was an instrument of torture "made in Germany,"[1] which seems to prove it is no accident that the imperial *burg* of Nürnberg can to this day show to the horrified tourist such monstrous inventions as the *eiserne Jungfrau* and all the other appliances for torturing that are stored in the Pentagonal Tower.

The history of Issogne has two parts; one dating from its birth in 1470, and the other from its resurrection in 1872. Giorgio of Challant built it for the use of his nephew and ward, Filiberto, and his sister-in-law, Marguerite de Chambave, widow of his brother Luigi and mother of Filiberto. Giorgio had lived a long time in Rome—he was a prelate of high rank—and had become acquainted with the wonderful creative activities of the early Renaissance, and with the comfort and splendour of the metropolitan life: these he brought to the Val d'Aosta and put into Issogne. He was no soldier and did not erect a castle; a quiet man, in peaceful times, he built a manor-house, a fine country residence. The succeeding counts of

[1] Frutaz, in Inventory of the "Grande Salle après la cuisine": " . . . *ung collier de fer fait en Allemagne avec pointes dedans pour tourmenter ung homme au col*" (" . . . a collar of iron, made in Germany, with points inside it, to torment a man at the neck").

Challant always loved Issogne and held on to it affectionately to the last: only at the beginning of the nineteenth century was it sold out with all its contents.

The same fate hung for a time over Issogne as over the other feudal seats—part of the movable things were carried away; the dwelling itself, abandoned. But, fortunately, not for long: before the injury of desertion had become serious, Vittorio Avondo, a wealthy painter of Turin, bought it and began to care for it with all the tender love and the unselfish enthusiasm of which the soul of a solitary artist may be capable. The building itself was in good condition, for the vandal and the forager had had no chance of entering it, and no peasant had yet heaped his farm stores against frescoes, or hung his pig from a coffered ceiling for the extreme sacrifice.

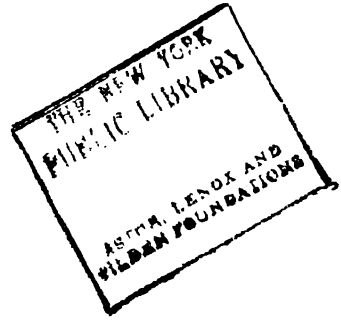
To Avondo, the re-making of Issogne became a life-work; he gave it thirty years and a large fortune. He first cleaned all the rooms: with his own hands he refreshened the numerous mural paintings, indulging in no wilful restoration. He strengthened the floors and the beamed ceilings, and then set himself to the most difficult and expensive of all his tasks, the refurnishing. With the marvellous patience of a scholar, and some-

times the cunning of a detective, he traced and bought back from dealers and private houses as much of the original furniture as he could. He then ransacked all the villages of the valley of Aosta, and of Savoy, searching for early Renaissance furniture; and this also he brought to his manor-house, which was slowly taking shape under his able hand. Where he could not complete absolutely necessary furnishing with old pieces, as in the case of the long, carved, wall-seats in the baronial hall, he had them reproduced with the most painstaking accuracy. He recovered some of the scattered paintings and put them back into the rooms where they had originally been placed.

When the work was finished, the generous artist presented the manor to the State; and there to-day stands Issogne, most of its ancient glory restored to it, a bit faded, a little worn and melancholy, as if sighing for the pageants of other days, but worthy now as of yore to harbour a noble family. In fact, it is so well refitted that Vittorio Avondo has spent in it some time every summer for many years, reserving to himself the right to occupy part of it for all the summers still left to his active life: otherwise the house is free to visitors.

The house is built around three sides of an

The Court of the Manor-house of Issogne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irregular court, which opens on the fourth side into a secluded garden, surrounded by a low wall. In the middle of the court stands a stone fountain, out of the centre of which rises a quaint wrought-iron tree. A serener spot than this court could hardly be imagined: the frescoed entrance portico, the elegant leaded windows, lighting the chapel above, and following up the spiral stairway, the shady freshness of the garden, and the silence, broken only by the murmur of the water of the fountain, invite to dreamy contemplation. All around the walls, are frescoed the armorial bearings of the different branches of the family of Challant. A passing army of the French Revolution whitewashed and spoiled them in the name of the Republic, but Avondo brought them again to light, scraping away their covering with toilsome patience.

On the first floor of the house, the parts especially remarkable are the dining-room, the armory, and the so-called baronial hall—very likely used as a dancing and reception hall—with an immense fireplace and the Challant coat-of-arms frescoed above it. On the second floor, there is the chapel,—its altar of finely carved wood the original one, before which Giorgio of Challant himself celebrated the first mass: in the adjoining room,

Cardinal Madruzzo, a family relative, slept when a guest at the manor: in the room of Renato of Challant, hang the original portraits of himself and of his wife Mancia and their daughters. On the third floor, the room of the lilies, which once harboured a visiting king of France, has a magnificent ceiling, carved in lilies: off the loggia above the chapel, where at one end, in Gothic types, is written the indication—*Garderobe de la Tapysserie*,—was the room for storing curtains, rugs, hangings, etc.: the tiny schoolroom for the children is hard by on the same floor. That the lords of Challant did not lay much stress upon book-learning, the size of this room bears witness, as does also the ostensible fact that the preceptor and the boys were not even supplied with a blackboard,—the wall did just as well, judging from the geometrical figures still scrawled upon it!

We have just mentioned Renato of Challant and Cardinal Madruzzo: these two personages are strictly connected with Issogne and the later destinies of the house of Challant. Renato, the last of the family to make for himself a noteworthy place in history, was a highly successful diplomat and statesman, but a very unfortunate *paterfamilias*. He married first a noble Milanese lady,

Bianca Visconti, and took her to Issogne. Since he was often called away on State business, the young and fair Bianca wearied of mountain solitude and ran away, returning to the sumptuous life of the Milanese court. It seems that Renato did not care to coax her back, and that Bianca developed very *sporty* tendencies,—perhaps this was the cause of Renato's unconcern. Handsome and rich, Renato's blooming "grass widow" had gallants a-plenty about her. She was decidedly capricious with them and changed her favourite often; but she had such absolute control over them that once she persuaded one of the number to slay another, who had affronted her. For this crime, she was arrested, tried, and beheaded. Renato soon profited by the joyous freedom so gruesomely won, and married again.

His second wife bore him two daughters, Filiberta and Isabella, and by-and-bye the time came when they were ready for marriages of their own. Then, in 1557, appeared upon the scene Cardinal Madruzzo, Prince-bishop of Trent, who, in behalf of his nephew, sued for Filiberta's hand. He—*i.e.*, his nephew—was speedily accepted and the date for the marriage was set. The whole family moved to Milan for the ceremony and everything was prepared with suitable splendour.

But the day before the wedding, Filiberta, as many a girl before and after her has done, eloped with a groom of her father's stables, one Lespail. Though in distress, Filiberta kept a cool head in the difficult moment and did not overlook the precaution of taking along with her about three thousand *écus'* (thirty-five hundred dollars, or seven hundred pounds sterling) worth of coin and jewels to make her love venture comfortable, regardless of the fact that the coin and jewels belonged in part to her mother and sister.

The young Madruzzo did not lose heart, neither did his uncle, nor his prospective father-in-law: Isabella was substituted for Filiberta, and, except for the change of *prima donna*, all proceeded according to programme.

For punishment, Filiberta was disinherited. With Lespail, she went to Venice, whither every new couple in Italy—legal or illegal—betake themselves for the honeymoon as in America they "drop around" Niagara Falls. Before long, Lespail died—hanged for Filiberta's theft, it is said—and Filiberta came back to Issogne, where, meanwhile, in 1558, her mother had died, heart-broken: there she lived two most unhappy years, and then married a Count Tornielli of Novara, in 1565. The adventures of the prodigal daughter do not

seem to have affected her final standing seriously: soon after her marriage she claimed her share of heredity and got it; she boldly entitled herself Countess of Challant, was called "illustrious and dearest cousin" by the duke of Savoy,[1] and kept on merrily wrangling with her sister Isabella till death (date uncertain, but before 1589). The *sang-froid* of her first misstep evidently stayed by Filiberta to the end.

This love-drama can be followed on the walls of Issogne, through the written testimony of Filiberta, who left, *more solito*, her diary secrets scratched on the walls. Isabella's marriage took place in 1557. Now in one of the bedrooms, we read the inscriptions: *Omnia vincit amor* (Love conquers all things); *Vivamus et amemus* (Let us live and love), with the dates, 1554 and 1556: was not that Filiberta in love with her groom? And again: *Non est amor imo dolor mulieris amor* (It is not love, but pain—a woman's love): perhaps Cardinal Madruzzo had appeared! Then the inscription, now whitewashed: *Jolande prie Dieu et la Sainte Vierge pour son enfant*[2]: might *Jolande* have been another name for the sinning Filiberta, and those words the girl's cry of anguish on the

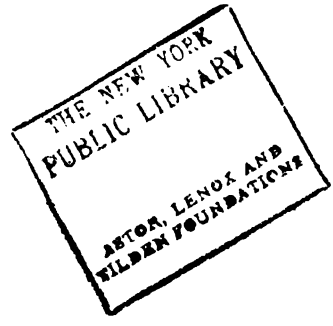
[1] Vaccarone (Challants), page 32, note.
[2] Giacosa, page 94.

eve of her flight from her home? Then a long silence. The 4th of October, 1564, these words were written on the same wall: *In me turbatum est cor meum* (My heart is troubled within me); July 22, 1565: *Moeror et dolor venerunt super me* (Anguish and sorrow came upon me); October 26, 1565: *Deficit in dolore vita mia* (My life fails in sorrow). Then silence again; this time, unbroken. The years 1564–1565 were those of the stay at Issogne of the repentant Filiberta, toward whom sister Isabella was particularly unkind. Meanwhile, the easy-going Madruzzo, satisfied in the happy possession of an efficient chatelaine, and, for the time being, of a double dot, wrote on the wall, 1564: *Viva la Signora Isabella di Challant, moglie di me, Giovanni Federico Madruzzo, Princeps Tridenti, Barone de Beauffremont* (Long live Signora Isabella of Challant, wife of me, Giovanni Federico Medruzzo, Prince of Trent, Baron of Beauffremont).

This incident marks the beginning of the end of the Challant house. Renato left his holdings to his daughter, as his ancestor Francesco had done; and, as happened then, numerous male pretenders rose to contest the heritage in the name of the Salic law. The legal strife lasted, with varying fortune, for a hundred and thirty-one years, closing

A Bed in the Apartments of Renato of Challant (Manor-house of Issogne)

From a photograph by Frances Ferrero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at last in the recognition of the rights of the male line of Challants. But the fortune of the family had been badly compromised by the avidity of lawyers and the castles had been sadly neglected: when, in 1696, the counts of Challant entered again into possession of the ancestral seats, they had little money left and many ruins to their names. After that, the family languished to extinction.

CHAPTER III

OTHER HOUSES—BARONIAL LIFE

BEFORE proceeding with the castles of the Val d' Aosta, it is not altogether out of place to give passing notice of a few castles that do not strictly belong to the valley or to the old duchy, but which rise so near it that the traveller who visits the valley cannot help seeing them and wondering about them: we mean those of the *Canavese;* that is, of that region which, beginning at the opening of the valley of Aosta and having its centre in Ivrea, stretches for some distance eastward to the moraine of La Serra, southward toward the Po plains, and to the west along the mountain valleys that open below the valley of Aosta.

Guarding the openings of most of these valleys, and crowning the summit of many a hill of stones left by the ancient glaciers, stood the castles of the Canavese, which had a much more troublous and agitated career than the Valdostan castles, safely snuggled away behind the grim bluff of

Bard: but if there was more suffering in the Canavese, there was, at the same time, more history; since history records sorrows and distress in detail, but goes lightly by happiness and comfort.

Ivrea was a *mark* of the German Empire, and its margraves at one time rose to great prominence, both national and international. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, they tried at least twice—once through Berenger II. and again through Arduin—to unite Italy under an Italian, and thus make the country independent of the domination of the German emperors, as France had done for itself a century before. Berenger even had himself crowned emperor. The rivalry of the many Italian petty lords, however, frustrated the attempt.

Arduin, who had begun the new millennium as a national king, after sustaining long, and at times successful, struggles against Emperor Henry II., retired eleven years later, and died in 1015, in a monastery of his own founding; and so was the unification of Italy postponed for over eight centuries more. Once, during the war with the Emperor, Arduin found himself so hard pressed, that he had to shut himself up in the castle of Sparone, in the valley of the Orco, so strong a hold,

through natural position and artificial construction, that after a whole year's siege, the Emperor gave up and went away.

Arduin has been dead nearly nine centuries now, but his memory has lived so fresh among the inhabitants of that district, that around him as its hero there has grown a whole body of legends, as around the famous paladin Roland, or around King Arthur: his bones are kept as reverently as the relics of a martyr, in the castle of Masino ten miles south of Ivrea, owned by the family Valperga di Masino, which traces its ancestry to Arduin as its head.

Ivrea itself has a large castle, with three towers —once they were four,—but it has nothing left that tells, with the silent testimony of ivy-grown walls, of the epic struggles of Arduin's time and his ambitious designs.

The castle is of the fourteenth century (1358). Of the epoch intervening between Arduin and the erection of this castle, Ivrea still preserves a custom that is faithfully, and even enthusiastically, adhered to and transmitted from generation to generation.

According to tradition, during the thirteenth century, the inhabitants of Ivrea, probably at the

hands of a lord more than usually unscrupulous—who, unfortunately, has been doomed nameless—had to suffer the ignominy of the most horrible of feudal bondages, that slavery of the body, the *droit de culage* (or *jus primæ noctis*) by which some lords claimed as their inherent right the first bloom of any bride within their dominions.[1] Such monstrous violation of the holy privacy of matrimony, which is even registered in some official documents as one of the assets of a fee,[2] probably did more than anything else to kindle that indomitable hatred of the feudal régime that quenched its thirst for blood in the French Revolution.

The Eporedians, however, who are a generous people, easily stirred by oppression and quick to act, did not wait so long to pour forth their resentment. Nothing impressed by the fact that the evil was everywhere rooted in the feudal

[1] Buchanan, lib. iv., § xxi., (page 86), speaking of King Evan III., tells of its origin, and—lib. vii., § xxl., (page 171) —speaking of Malcolm III., of its transformation.

[2] *Encyclopédie*—Article "Culage." The document is an inventory of the fee of St. Martin de Gaillard (France), dated April 7, 1507. The word "asset" must be interpreted as meaning that the *droit de culage* could be redeemed by a money ransom. The *droit de culage* was not done away with entirely until the XIXth century, although its exercise had been quite generally replaced with the ransom by the XVIIIth century.

world, when one day a victim more than usually fair and resolute did not submit to the sacrifice, but, like Judith, slew the coveter, they rose in a body, attacked the baronial keep, rescued the fair bride, massacred the inmates, and put an end, once for always, to a practice that added shame to the weight of serfdom.

The heroine was carried about the city in triumph, the whole population rejoicing in loud festivities: and every year since, Ivrea has seen, and will see for years to come, the gay crowds of its carnival move through the streets wearing red *pilei*—liberty caps—and carrying picks, oranges impaled on their points to symbolise the heads of their ancient tyrants. They throng around the castle, and after a show of attack on the building, snatch away to freedom, like her unforgotten predecessor, the fairest maiden of Ivrea; then follow her in triumphal procession through the town. Neither feudal lord nor modern government, no matter how tyrannically inclined, has ever dared interfere with this symbolic day in the carnival of Ivrea.

For its æsthetic value, more than for anything else, we must remember the castle of Montalto, a handsome pile on the top of a rocky hill a few

miles north of Ivrea, which the present owner, a Turin nobleman of exquisite artistic sense, keeps, as it were, to adorn the park of his modern villa, and preserves alike from further ruin and from any attempt at restoration. The high wall entirely surrounds a broad court, about which are built the chapel, the store-rooms and the family apartments. In the court, great trees cast deep shadows, and the ivy tod, grown to monster size, has killed and so effectively draped one of them, that it now stands there an ivy tree and not a linden, taller than the castle walls, green, summer and winter.

The people around Montalto have forgotten the names of most of the lords of their castle; but they remember some romantic tales, which, it must be said, in all fairness, might just as well have occurred anywhere else, and then been attached to Montalto for lack of anything more interesting to tell of it.

Once Emma of Montalto loved a Guiscard, son of a rival Canavese family: they used to meet secretly at a fountain, called yet the "fountain of sighs," not far below the castle. After a while, Guiscard openly begged his father to consent to his marriage; but the father, to justify a refusal, told him a bitter lie—that Emma was his half-sister,

by right of nature, not of law. Guiscard fled in horror, and went to war.

Emma's father heard the story, and since his wife was dead and could not clear herself, believed it: whereupon he drove Emma from the home and the girl took refuge with her nurse in a village on the Serra.

The end of the story is pitilessly sad even for a mediæval romance: Emma looked to see her lover once more, now that she was free, but he had died in battle and she did not know it. Her father sought vengeance by attacking and destroying the castle of Guiscard's father, but instead of revenge he found heart-breaking sorrow; for his enemy, on the point of death, confessed that he had lied. Then Emma's father hurried with all speed to her retreat, eager to undo his cruelty and bring his daughter back to her home, but reached the poor hut just in time to receive her last words; and she, too, died.

Another little story tells how a young man of the retinue loved Maria of Montalto, and was put out of the castle for the offence. He then travelled about the country as a troubadour, singing on his guitar the rending story of his broken heart. When they told him that there was to be a celebration at Montalto, with a competition for min-

The Entrance to the Baronial Apartments, Court of Castle of Montalto

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strels, he went to it and carried off the first prize; but he was recognised, and again roughly and unceremoniously thrust beyond the gates. Then he went warring: but finally he saw his chance; Montalto was besieged. He rushed to the scene, and—needless to say—he scattered the besiegers, killing them, single-handed, by the score, and delivered the castle. This, of course, was sufficient proof of his worth to make him acceptable to Maria's father: they were married and lived happily ever after,—the story does not say so, but this we assume, as a recompense proportionate to the knight's constancy.

As we enter the first gorges of the valley of Aosta, though we are not yet ethnologically or politically inside it, we pass the castle of Cesnola, and beyond that we come to the castle of Castruzzone, above the village of Carema. There would be nothing peculiar about Castruzzone, a shapeless mass of stones, dating from the tenth century, were it not for a curious feature which has, we are sure, no duplicate anywhere: a unique product of the union of a freak of nature with an incident of building.

The castle had a tower, extraordinarily massive, with enormous walls, and a central space hardly

seven feet in diameter. Once, just when, nobody knows, lightning struck the tower and cut it literally in two, across the very middle, throwing the upper part to the ground: there the hopelessly truncated portion remained, lying on its side, without breaking apart, a gigantic pipe of masonry. And who fancies so to please himself, may walk on its side wall through the singular building that some far age had erected for climbing.

We do not want to close these few pages about the castles of the Canavese, without at least mentioning the name of the castle of Pavone—already existing in the tenth century—which Francesco d'Andrade of Turin has resurrected from its ruins by an able restoration, and has made into a comfortable summer residence—a patient work, worthy in many ways of that which was done in Issogne; we should like to describe it fully, did it not take us too far from our subject.

Let us now come back to our valley. We know that the Challants for a long time had the lion's share in Valdostan affairs and holdings: their wealth, their number, and their power were so great that their house outdid any other family in the valley in the glistening glory of their deeds.

This does not mean that the other families, of which there were many in the valley, had no part at all in its history: they were rightfully planets in the same constellation, rotating with Challant around the same sun; and not satellites that had to content themselves with the reflected light of the brightest planet of the system.

A description of the Challant castles, great and small, while it covers the most important and impressive buildings in the valley, cannot comprise all of them. Some of the other castles may even have had better fortune and may be in better condition than some of the Challants' holdings: only, in them is wanting that charm of prestige which great names and great feats lend to old monuments.

Some of these minor castles have been acquired by modern families of means, and restored for summer use. Prominent among them are the castles of Sarre and St. Pierre, above Aosta. The first one, an ancient holding of the ill-famed house of Bard,[1] belongs now to the royal house of Savoy. The second, once the seat of the barons of St. Pierre, now owned by a family that has recently received the same baronial title, but is not related to the original possessors, may be taken for a

[1] See following chapter, pages 274–276.

characteristic symbol, imaging feudal society, as one sees its picturesque pile from the valley, perched high on a lone bluff, with its church a little lower on the hillside, and its village gathered humbly at the bottom of the cliff. The restoration is perhaps somewhat incongruous and a trifle too free—in singular and striking contrast to the architecture of the other castles of the valley: but the result is, nevertheless, very attractive.

The ruins of the castle of Montmayeur, at the entrance of Val Grisanche, nestled on a rock, in a narrow and ugly gorge, have a sinister legend fastened upon them. The man who founded the castle was—the legend says—a Savoyan baron, who killed the chairman of the Chambéry senate, and withdrew to the valley of Aosta for safety. The castle belonged later to the house of Avise.

The castles of Sarriod, Avise, and Introd, above Aosta, and the castles of Nus and Quart below Aosta, still stand, having donned the modest garb of service as country and farm houses. The castle of Introd shows a peculiarity that must be due to a queer architectural idiosyncrasy of the counts of Bard, its founders, since it is also to be seen in the ruins of their castle of Pont St. Martin: a kitchen for which even the immense fireplaces of the type of Verrès were apparently thought too

small, for the whole kitchen is a fireplace, the hearth in the middle and the entire vault curved—an all-embracing hood—toward the central chimney. This feature is nowhere else to be found, a misfortune, truly—it would have shown off with proper dignity in that castle of Challant, where they kept their wine in a cement cistern.

The castles of Pont St. Martin, of Châtel-Argent, of Chatelard, of Bionnay, of Arnaz, and others, scattered everywhere, and too numerous even to name, are in ruins, like the Challant castles of Montjovet, of Challant, of Graines, and of Ussel; but are sufficient reward for a visit, even though the visitor have to scramble up asperous paths, toil through thick brambles, stumble upon slippery débris. We cannot relate any wonderful history about most of these ruins; in most cases, we cannot even recall stories and legends: but so much the freer for that is the play of imagination.

There is hardly a sight more likely to invite the mind to roam fancy-free, than the crumbling walls of an ancient castle, its solitary towers, its tottering merlons, its windows gaping on all sides over empty space. We may wander out to the ruin on a summer day; the lizards bask drowsily in the heat, a snake crawls stealthily and noise-

lessly among the stones, and the cicadas sing their loud and monotonous pæan to the burning air: or we may approach it on a night of full moon, when the equally unearthly whiteness of the light and blackness of the shadows, the mysterious noises of the silent, empty building, the weird echoes of voice and footfall, the heavy, lugubrious flapping of bats' dull wings, make the ghosts of long-gone inhabitants too real for comfort; and we shall always feel an irresistible need of touching the dead walls, of turning our eyes to the cold fireplaces, of scanning the dark passages, as if appealing to them to tell us something of what they saw, to raise for us the veil of days of past glories, to let us hear again the speech of their guests, their laugh in joys, their sobs in sorrows. Have those walls, wrought by hands of men unknown and gone like shadows to the shadows of the past, those walls that time and weather are undoing, stone by stone—have they secrets of which they were mute witness, secrets that could send a thrill through our nerves or make our heart-beats slacken, secrets of adventurous conquest, of lives cheerily risked in bold emprise, or of gloomy vengeance in dim dungeons, of wrathful conspiracies against tyrants, of disloyal scheming by family members and

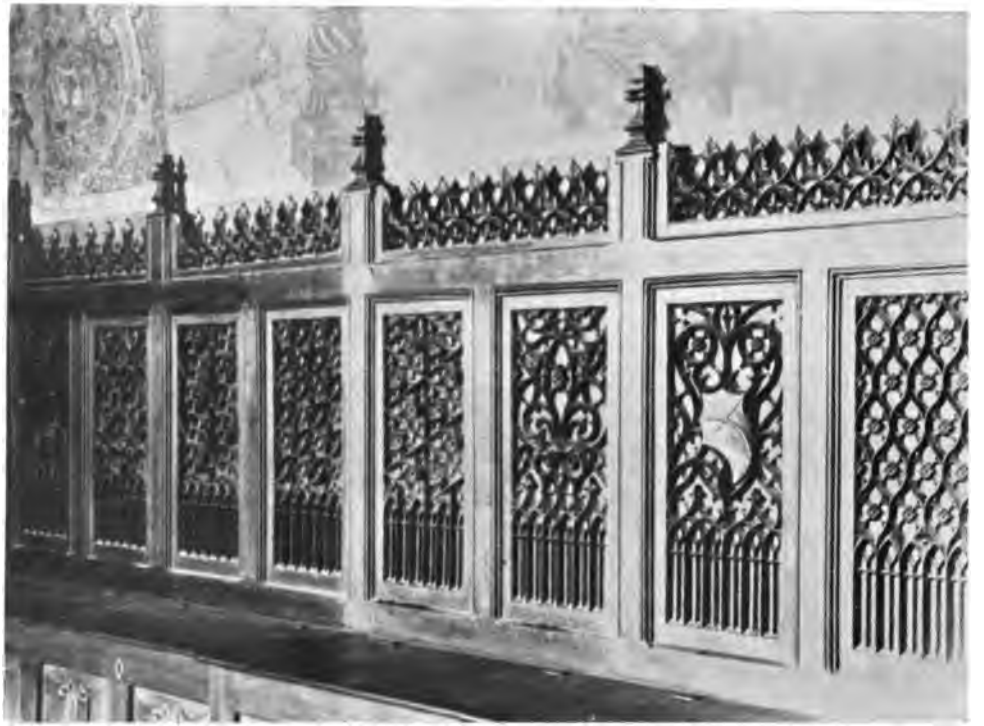
servants, or of love intrigues, of sweet serenades, of stealthy messages?

But walls are not men: if they have secrets, they keep them, and bury them always deeper under breakage and briars, till the all-levelling mother earth covers them with a soft carpet of grass, a mask of trees, and they are gone forever. All that the inquisitive visitor can pluck from them is a scrap of information here and there, where he can decipher some letters on a tablet, or an autograph scratched in the plaster. And that is best, after all, as well for the inquisitive visitor, who would have no chance, if the walls talked like politicians, to exercise his archæological bent, and to build historical proof with the alluring methods of trials on merely circumstantial evidence, as for the romantically inclined, who might be grievously shocked by the recital of an endless series of commonplace events. We fear, indeed, that ignorance of actual facts is the only way to maintain pleasing delusions about castles and castle-dwellers, who—were it not for the historical haze that softens the contours of all their deeds, or blurs their figures altogether—would reveal to us a psychological nature too similar to our own to be at all interesting.

We cannot say that this is true of every or any

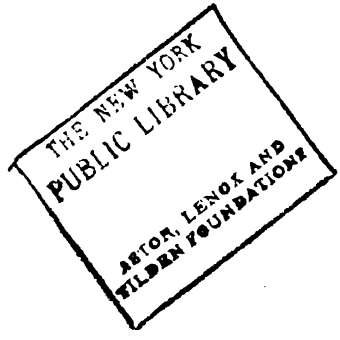
one mediæval donjon and lord, but for the valley of Aosta, at least, there is no doubt that the life of the barons in their castles was not at all enviable or attractive: and by this we do not mean to refer to the barons of the dark ages, whose lives in a wild country were hardly better than those of their serfs; but to the lords of the gentler and more luxurious epoch of the Renaissance, of those fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, which could find very little in our extravagant times to envy, in the way of wealth, comfort, and refinement.

Families like the Challants, whose rank and resources were almost princely, may have had a chance to enjoy some of the broader life of the cities, to which their best men were called as statesmen, or sent as governors and embassadors, and where doubtless some of the women found a place by the side of the men: but the minor members of that family, as well as most of the members of other houses, were bound to spend their time on their lands in the mountains, to look after interests not always secure from others' greed. In their castles, there was not much beside the dull round of daily occupations to keep them busy, and not much to divert them besides the changes in their activities that came periodically with the change of seasons.



A Carved Wall-seat in the Baronial Hall (Manor-house of Issogne)

From a photograph by Frances Ferrero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Up early in the morning, the lord began to look after the business of his little state: the servants gathered in the court, brought in the provisions, and prepared horses—or mules—and dogs for the outings; while in the baronial hall were tried criminal and civil cases requiring the direct attention of the lord. His officers were present to receive orders—what to do to protect a certain road from robbers, what to do to prevent the ever-threatening leprosy or the plague from entering the domains, what to do to keep a certain hamlet quiet, how to provide against a shortage of crop, how to go about the inventory of the property of a dead vassal and the guardianship of his children, how to raise some needed money, and so on. The baron had to exercise, at the same time, legislative, executive, and judicial power, to be equal to all emergencies, to be ready for any happening. Supreme was his authority, but equally limitless were his responsibilities and his duties. The man that took his place seriously and conscientiously—we like to think there were such even then—had no light task before him.

Meanwhile, the lady and her daughters, also early risers, busied themselves in the kitchen, in the sewing-room, in the wardrobe: they had to be careful and they looked after their servants

watchfully. The young men of the house went out hunting sometimes, accompanied by their father: there was no falcon hunting in the valley of Aosta, as falcons and horses are better suited for use in the open fields, but there was more than enough to satisfy the desire of the most enthusiastic hunter, for large game was plentiful: bears, wolves, foxes, chamois, deer, were then at home in the forests of the valley, and the chase, for men armed only with spears and knives, or, later, with primitive arquebuses, contained enough elements of excitement and danger to entice the young knights to venture, and make the young ladies at home shiver and admire.

Dinner was served, when the affairs of state were over, at ten, or eleven o'clock. It was generally a very simple meal, though very abundant, and generously encouraged by the spirituous wines of the valley, though rarely were the Valdostan seigniors found guilty of excessive indulgence in drink.

After dinner, and the siesta thereto appertaining, the family gathered in the garden, if the season was good, or in the living-rooms, if the season was bad, and spent their time in chatting with friends, in social games, and playing cards—after these were introduced from the Orient. Of

books, there was great scarcity in the castles, and from them rarely did the inmates get instruction and pastime.

The most sensational entertainment that could befall the castle dwellers, and the one most eagerly looked forward to, in their daily routine, was the arrival of troupes of minstrels and jugglers, who were always welcome to stop and rest from their wanderings. They travelled with trained bears and monkeys and dogs, and they gave circus performances in the courts of the keep: then, in the evening, they were called into the baronial hall, and before the whole castle retinue, gathered for the occasion, played tricks and pranks that made the spectators wild with delight. They were even invited to the private living-rooms of the lord's family and breathlessly listened to, when they told their tales of travel among foreign peoples, to the far Eastern countries, to the great cities; of their braving unheard of dangers—also mostly imaginary,—of their battling with men and beasts and demons.

When they left the rooms, late at night, the well-amused lords showered them with presents, and the excited ladies slipped under the bed-covers to dream of wondrous lands and beings, of minarets and mosques, of emperors and kings.

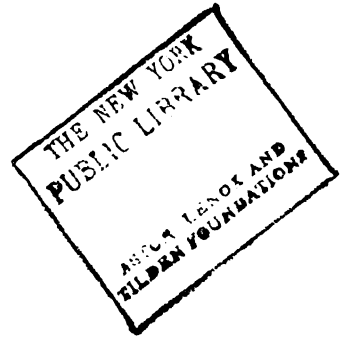
Those were the only occasions when the chatelains allowed themselves to stay up late; ordinarily, soon after sundown, the family retired, because oil lamps were smoky and oil was expensive. These occurrences were probably the chief purveyors of tidings from the outside world that reached the castles, along with the news-bringing itinerant merchants, who went through the valley and tarried to display their foreign wares.

So the days and the weeks and the years went by: the seigniors mixed freely with their people and partook of their festivities, getting from them what amusement and variety they could. Otherwise, little broke the monotony of the even stream of time. In summer they had outdoor freedom to add cheer; winter, instead, kept them indoors, in poorly lighted and poorly heated halls, with heavy tapestries to break drafts, but the only consolation a cheerful blaze in their big fireplaces.

Once in a while, some great event came to stir the valley, like the arrival of the suzerain from Chambéry, or the visit of another feudatory, a friendly lord from afar. These occasions also brought diversity to the castles, but it is not certain that the barons were elated over them; for they brought heavy expense with the variety.

The Kitchen of the Manor-house of Issogne

From a photograph by Frances Ferrero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So was the life of Valdostan lords spent in daily cares that have nothing especially romantic about them: probably no *bourgeois* of the twentieth century would give up his large share of enjoyment of the world for the power of those miniature sovereigns of the middle ages. All the luxuries that we consider so thoroughly a part of our homes as to be no luxuries at all, but bare necessities—books, newspapers, magazines, artificial light and heat, running water, baths, soft mattresses, plenty of furniture and rugs, musical instruments—were either practically, or wholly, unknown to the Valdostan castle. Virtues and vices were, naturally, the same then as now; the same passions had then the same license as now: but for virtues and vices and passions—as well as for their bodies—moderns have made much cozier nests, far more comfortable nooks.

Withal, in their cold keeps, the seigniors of the castles were surely no more unhappy—and possibly they were happier—than modern men, the momentum of whose avaricious slavings is an ever-increasing cause of dissatisfaction and anxiety. And, in spite of all the political franchises that have fallen upon them from the sky, the people that live now in the valley are not necessarily happier than they were then. They had to pay

tributes then, and have to pay taxes now; they had to give personal services then, and they have to submit to conscription now: but once their lords lived with them and, to a certain extent, shared their hardships, while now their taxes go to "the government"; that is, to a something far away, of which they have but a faint understanding; their conscription takes them into parts unknown, and the rich men of the valley, often strangers who have started industries or opened mines in it, enjoy their money in cities apart.

CHAPTER IV

TALES OF THE FORTS

JUST beyond Donnaz, the main valley of Aosta suddenly narrows into the gorge of Bard: the ridges on both sides come so near together that they have left no space except for the torrent Dora, which, no doubt, had to work hard in by-gone ages to free a passage for itself. The road of the valley once had to scale the heights and round the obstacle at some distance above: only in modern times, and with the help of great rock- and tunnel-blasting, was it possible to carry both road and railroad right through the gorge to the open plateau of Verrès.

It is no wonder that at such a naturally difficult and commanding point very early in history—and probably before that—men erected fortifications and castles: he who held the stronghold at Bard practically mastered the valley; for he could at his will keep back anybody going either from the mountains to the plains, or from the

plains to the mountains. Neither is it a wonder that the feeling of power given by the position, to those who had the good fortune to become masters of Bard, inclined them to be overweeningly tyrannical and oppressive.

The counts of Bard were the most powerful family of the valley in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, only rivalled by the rising family of Challant; and they seem to have been an ugly lot, hard on everybody around them. Count Ugone I., in 1191, owned, beside Bard, Châtel Argent, and Sarre, Pont St. Martin and Champorcher; but of all, he chose the gloomiest and fiercest for his residence, because it allowed freer play to his avocation of brigand—Bard, the domineering bluff, the nightmare of travellers.

Many were the complaints against the heavy-of-hand and light-of-conscience Ugone; but louder still rose the cry of protest and the appeals for help when his son, Ugone II., entered into possession of the fee. What kind of men the scions of this family were, is shown by the fact that Ugone and his brother Guglielmo, who had received the fee jointly, began at once to war with each other, as soon as the father's eyes were closed to the light of day. Ugone seized Guglielmo's son; and Guglielmo burned the castle of Champorcher; to

which Ugone responded by burning Donnaz and its vineyards—a queer way of contending for an heredity, that of destroying all that goes to make it such!

After many years, through priestly intervention, the two brothers came to an agreement: Guglielmo retired to Pont St. Martin, and Ugone remained in Bard, where he turned his undesirable attention from his brother to the passers-by. Aggressions and robberies finally became so frequent in the unlucky, but unavoidable passage, and the warnings from the viscounts of Aosta were so utterly disregarded, that the counts of Savoy at last took the matter in hand and occupied Bard with a military expedition. Ugone, proud as Lucifer, refused further to recognise his allegiance to the counts of Savoy, and left the valley forever—no one, surely, regretting his departure, or seeking to detain him. It seems that he settled in Burgundy, but nothing definite is known of his later adventures.

Two of his sons were willing to accept the conditions of the conquering seignior, and remained in the valley, after giving up their title to Bard: as a proof of loyalty, they changed their name to that of Sarriod, and adopted a new shield. So the name of the counts of Bard disappeared,

though, by a curious coincidence, their descendants with the name of Sarriod are the only family of Valdostan nobility yet existing in the valley.

Bard was transformed into a fortress, a military establishment, the purpose of which was at the same time to keep order in the valley and to give a tangible show of the reality of the suzerain's powers. As a fortress, much altered through the centuries, according to the changing military fashions of the times, it still guards the dreaded narrows, though its importance is necessarily much diminished.

Hardly showing above the edge of the towering bluff toward the outside of the valley, Bard presents to the inside a most formidable front, with gigantic walls that look like wrought mountain sides, with numerous cannon-holes concealing nobody knows what murderous instruments of destruction in their black and silent shadows. It never saw hard service as a fortress, for foreign invasions through the valley have been few; yet who knows but the very fact of its presence, the knowledge of an obstruction so hard to overcome, did not keep off from the valley armies that might otherwise have gone through it, making them choose safer and easier ways? Who knows but that the old, grim fortress is responsible for much

of the relative quiet enjoyed by the valley for centuries.

The last time—and it was probably the first also—that Bard came into great prominence in the world at large, was in 1800, when it stopped the progress of the army Napoleon had brought over the Grand St. Bernard against the Austrians, and for almost two weeks baffled all his efforts at forcing the way. The French army did finally overcome the difficulty, but just how is a subject of much discussion among historians, though one would say that an event of such recent date ought to be easily enough investigated to make its actual details a matter of fact and not of argument.

The story generally goes, that finding vain all attempts to seize the fort, either by surprise, or by assault, Bonaparte hit upon an almost desperate plan. He had all his gun-wheels wound with straw and rags, and that part of the road under the fire of the fort stealthily strewn during a stormy night with manure and hay; then he rushed all his artillery through at great speed, before the garrison above could know what was happening in the darkness.

Napoleon's detractors, of whom there are many, seeing how the heroic turn of the dash easily lent

a weak side to attack, boldly derided this account of the passage, which Napoleon himself had sent to Paris. They said that in the night between the 24th and the 25th of May, the general tried to force the way with the artillery, but had to give up, leaving many men dead on the road, and getting only two cannons to the other side of the fort and safely into the lower part of the valley; that Napoleon himself, after making his troops work under great pressure, to put in order the path of Altbard and Col du Joux (on the heights to the north of the fort), dragged all his troops, his cavalry and his cannon, up the mountain—to the height of forty-five hundred feet—and down the other side, there picking up the two guns that had passed a few days before, and hurrying on toward Marengo. The latest anti-Napoleonists declare they have found the proof of their assertions in the reports of that particular campaign, published in 1900 by the French War Office.[1] These documents, however, do not uphold them in any positive form: at best they leave a way open for doubt. The violent attack on Napoleon is, moreover, shown to be unjustified, by the fact that he himself had nothing to do directly with the planning and carrying out of the scheme, which was

[1] Cugnac, 1st vol. The passage of the Grand St. Bernard.

the work of General Berthier, Commander-in-chief of the Reserve Army.

The story, as told by the reports, is exactly as follows: General Berthier, arriving in front of the fortress of Bard, after having explored the neighbourhood and the heights above it, declares it to be impossible to drag the heavier artillery over the pass—the Col de la Cou (or Col du Joux) is pronounced very dangerous—or to proceed unless the fortress is taken.[1] Three small cannons are carried by men to Altbard to keep the fortress under fire.[2] Napoleon (who, by the way, was then with the rearguard at Aosta) suggests that the artillery might be sent around by Gressoney.[3] Berthier decides to attack the village below the fort,[4] and takes it, thereby occupying the carriage road of the valley in the portion under the fort, but exposed to the fire of its guns and rifles. Not succeeding in capturing the fort by assault, or persuading its command to surrender, Berthier orders two guns to be hurried through the village, on road strewn with manure and hay,

[1] Letter from Berthier to the First Consul, of the 29th floreal, year 8 (May 19, 1800), in Cugnac, 1st vol., page 437.

[2] Letter as above, 1 prairial (May 21), page 455.

[3] Letter from the First Consul to Berthier, page 460.

[4] Letter from Berthier to the First Consul, 2 prairial (May 22), page 464.

as an experiment, and succeeds without loss of men.[1]

These are the two guns that are conceded to have passed. After that, the reports say nothing about the other cannon, while—this is true—Napoleon was sending glowing accounts of the passage to Paris. The facts, that Berthier declared impossible the passing of the heavier artillery over the heights, and that this heavier artillery is mentioned as in use about Ivrea a few days later, settles almost beyond contention that it went through in the same manner as the two guns sent first in experiment; the passage over the heights requiring many days of untiring effort,—and this the editor of the reports himself states.[2] So that the only pieces carried over the heights were, if any, the four or five small guns of three and four centimetres' calibre, of which no further notice is to be found in the book.

The account of the reports and that given by Thiers[3] and Sloane,[4] can be equally accepted; they complete, not contradict, each other: since the nocturnal passage under the cannon of the fort was restricted to the heavy artillery, which needed

[1] Letter as above, 5 prairial (May 25), page 518.
[2] Cugnac, 1st vol., page 522, note.
[3] Thiers, book iv., Marengo (vol. i., page 123 *et seq.*).
[4] Sloane, 2d vol., pages 112–113.

as broad and easy a road as possible; while it was officially stated that Napoleon used the path of Altbard (called *Albaredo*, by the authors named), and the Col du Joux, for the rest of his army.

That Napoleon was just the man to dare, or inspire, such a bold plan, his desperate charge at the bridge of Arcole, scarcely four years before, sufficiently proves. In refusing the current Napoleonic version of the famous Bard anecdote, the historians inimical to Napoleon have, after all, paid an involuntary compliment to him or his general, instead of detracting from their personality.

A desperate step to find a way out of a desperate situation may be a proof of daring recklessness, or simply an unavoidable act of necessity, but it is, *per se*, no proof of greatness. When, however, history tells us that a chieftain within the short period of two weeks, has known how to change a ruinous mountain trail into a passable path, and over that path has been able to take not only his forty thousand infantry, but also his seven or eight thousand cavalry with their horses, and his field-pieces with their ammunition, and has done all this in face of the enemy, which was occupying a most redoubtable fortress, expected to put a speedy end to the foreign inroad, we must

conclude that that chieftain is a great chieftain and has duplicated the already remarkable performance of the passage of the Grand St. Bernard under much more difficult and trying circumstances.

If at Bard, Napoleon—or his general, Berthier—was not the rash young soldier, then he was the matured, steady and clear-headed strategist: there is no other choice: whichever alternative we may adopt, the fact remains that Napoleon passed Bard, and that the Austrian garrison, having nothing left to do, surrendered it on the first of June.

The fort was destroyed by order of Napoleon, who evidently did not care to risk a repetition of the experience of 1800, should things go badly with him. Now it is supported, or perhaps more exactly, supplanted, by fortifications and batteries placed higher on the mountain sides.

That a strong military obstruction should be erected in such a place as Bard, cannot be thought surprising; strange, instead, may it appear to the wanderer to find remains of fortifications and strongholds on the highest parts of the valley, where no human being lives permanently and nature seems to have provided so many hindrances that

men need add no more. In the neighbourhood of the Théodule Pass, for instance, a long line of ramparts was built at the very edge of the glacier; so near, indeed, that at many a point the ice has pushed its way through them and shattered their heavy stone walls, and in others has contemptuously bespattered them with the dirt of its moraines or covered them quite, with dust and gravel.

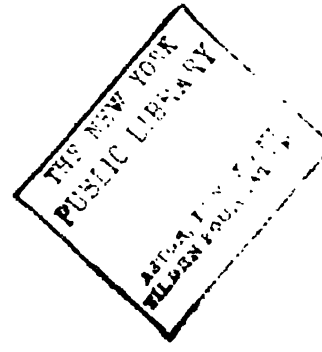
More ramparts were—and some are yet—to be found not far from the Col de Ferret, from the Grand St. Bernard, and from the high and wild passes of the Val Pelline. Stranger still may it seem that all these defences were put up to guard the Piedmontese frontier toward Switzerland, whence, apparently, no danger could threaten, and not the passes toward France, a great power that had often seriously interfered with Piedmontese affairs; but the Swiss were not the enemy the ramparts were meant to ward off.

Those strong safeguards were raised not against an enemy, but against a handful of people that rightfully belonged in Piedmont; not against possible invaders, but against a peaceful population, trying to return to their homeland, from which strength of conviction and desire for religious freedom had caused them to be expelled. We mean the Waldenses, the ancient Protestant stock

of the western Piedmontese valleys, who were then going through the last of their long series of persecutions. Once more, as they had done a century previously at the time of Calvin,[1] the Valdostans rose at the bidding of their church and their sovereign, and stood guard at the gates of their country. Since the action of the Valdostans and the duke of Savoy against the Waldenses seems inspired by narrow-mindedness and intolerance, rather than by the sense of any actual danger impending, or the fear of perilous innovations, it is only fair to say that—whatever the motive of the Valdostans' conduct—the duke of Savoy was forced into his part, only reluctantly carrying it out, and that he hastened to make good his mistake as soon as circumstances allowed.

It was the end of the seventeenth century. The fanaticism of Louis XIV. increased with his sins: not satisfied with his radical persecution of the Huguenots, which did clear out of France practically every trace of Protestantism, he set about destroying peaceful, non-Roman Catholic people, who, not living in his country, had nothing to do with him, and with whom he ought to have had nothing to do. Duke Victor Amadeus of

[1] See chapter v., pages 312–317.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Savoy, then in a position hardly better than a vassal's toward France, received a hint—amounting practically to an order—that the Waldenses must be driven out of Piedmont. Thus was Louis XIV. endeavouring to buy for himself entrance to that Paradise from which Father Lachaise, his confessor, was threatening constantly to debar him.

The Swiss Confederation had offered hospitality to the Waldenses, and the Duke exiled them in 1687, sending them, several thousand in number, under military escort across Savoy to the Swiss line. Switzerland pledged itself not to let them leave their new country.

But the new conditions were not satisfactory, and home-sickness was not slow to put in an appearance among the exiles. To a man of the city or of the plains, all mountains may seem alike, and, perhaps, all equally unattractive. To a mountaineer, there is nothing but *his* valley that appeals: all the rest is dreary and foreign world. The Waldenses dreamed of *their* green pastures, of the foaming waters of *their* Pellice, *their* Angrogna, *their* Germagnasca; and plotted how to get back.

They decided that, by the beginning of summer, they would gather near St. Maurice in Valais,

march in a body (about three thousand strong) to Martigny; from there, dividing forces, enter the valley of Aosta through the Grand St. Bernard and the Col de Ferret; then cross the Col de la Seigne and the Petit St. Bernard into the valley of the Isère; thence over the Col d'Iséran and the Montcenis, enter the valley of Susa, and, finally, from the valley of Susa, over the pass of the Assietta, reach again their beloved homeland. The plan contemplated a quadruple crossing of mountain chains at heights varying between seven thousand and nine thousand feet, and a march of over a week, on rough paths, among hostile populations; but their wills were set and their hearts steadfast.

This great enterprise, this modern *Anabasis* of small proportions, could not, for the moment, be executed. The plot leaked out; measures were taken to keep the good folk where they were, and those that actually started, were halted at Bex, near St. Maurice. The discovery caused a sensation in Europe, especially among the governments most directly connected with the affair; and the Duke o Savoy gave immediate orders to have all the Alpine passes that the Waldenses might be likely to try, fortified and closed by armed guards. In the valley of the Aosta, the announce-

ment almost inspired a panic:[1] much altered in its import, the news reached the valley that the Huguenots, perhaps fifty thousand strong, had swooped down upon Aosta, and were burning and sacking the country. The peasants, surprised unarmed, fled for their lives to the highest and most inaccessible regions. There was nothing in the rumour, and quiet was soon restored: but so deep had been the scare, that the Valdostans kept thenceforth good watch on the passes, and no Waldenses succeeded in entering the valley of Aosta.

The abandoned plan of the Waldenses was nevertheless revived and carried out, with some modifications and by only part of the exiled, the following year.[2] Knowing that the passes of Val d'Aosta were well patrolled, while other parts of Savoy and Tarantaise had been left practically ungarrisoned, the Waldenses, who as good mountaineers did not fear long and tiresome tramps, took a devious route. Most of their colonies had been located in the canton De Vaud, north of the lake of Geneva: so the corps of adventurous patriots in quest of their own, gathered—about nine hundred of them—on the shores of the lake,

[1] Vaccarone (*Vie*), page 73.
[2] See accompanying sketch map.

in the neighbourhood of Nyon, some distance north-east of Geneva: there they crossed the lake to the Savoyan shore.

When they reached this point, on the confines of Piedmontese territory and the difficulties of the way, they avoided the highroad where it enters Faucigny (the valley of Chamonix) but took to it some distance up the valley, by rounding the Mont Voiron and descending through Viuz. From there, without being in the least impeded, they marched up the valley of the Arve, through Cluses to Sallanches. Probably anticipating the possibility of trouble on the way to the Col du Bonhomme, they abandoned at Sallanches the great valley of Chamonix, climbed to Megève, and from there over the mountains, passed to Haute Luce in the high valley of the Doron, a secondary valley of the Isère.

So far, they had climbed only two passes—on the Mont Voiron and between Megève and Haute Luce; but the way soon grew much rougher. Always in an attempt to keep away from the beaten path, the nine hundred from Haute Luce reached, through the valley of Gitte, the Col de la Croix du Bonhomme, and from there descended to Bourg St. Maurice, finally reaching the main valley of the Isère and the point where they had

intended to arrive the year before by following the much easier way across the upper valley of Aosta.

From Bourg St. Maurice, the two itineraries were the same: always keeping away from main lines of traffic, up the valley of the Isère, over the Col de l'Iséran (fourth pass), down into the valley of the Arc to Bessan; thence over Montcenis (fifth pass) to the valley of Susa and over the various passes on the chain dividing the Val di Susa from the groups of Waldensian valleys, into the promised land—a land of rocks and forests and tumbling waters, but their own; a land of poor huts and hard lives, but all their own.

At the Col du Bonhomme they feared resistance, but the commander of the Piedmontese troops, busy watching the Valdostan passes, had left the Bonhomme to take care of itself; and the pilgrims passed with no other incumbrance but a heavy rain on their backs and deep snow at their feet. Just beyond Bourg St. Maurice, they found a bridge barricaded, and occupied by peasants armed with pitchforks; but the governor in charge of the valley, after a conference with the Waldensian leaders, ordered the way cleared. At Salbertrand, in Val di Susa, just before the last pass, the Waldenses met with the only determined

opposition in their progress, an attack by some French troops; but the assailants were few, and were soon compelled to retire. So, after two years of exile, the nine hundred with a forced march lasting seven days, re-entered their homes.

The year 1690 promised to be a gloomy one for the history of the Waldenses. The seven thousand left in canton De Vaud, were planning to follow their vanguard and open a passage by force of arms; and the governments of Switzerland, France, and Piedmont were preparing for a regular field campaign that would have caused much bloodshed, owing to the bitter feeling on both sides. On the other hand, the nine hundred who had returned to their homes, had been there attacked by a strong body of French troops; and after long resistance, by the middle of the year, they were beginning to be in serious distress, because of their small and diminishing number: only seven hundred were still in condition to carry arms, but the enemy could draw on unlimited fresh supplies.

At that juncture, however, the already strained relations between France and Piedmont suddenly ended in a snap: war broke out between mighty France and little Piedmont, and the Duke of

Savoy at once recalled all the Waldenses to their own places.

The war of those years and the following War of the Spanish Succession, in which the Duke of Savoy boldly took sides with the allies against France, distracted Louis's attention from Protestantism, and the Waldenses were left alone. Thankful to the Duke, they helped him bravely in the trying moments of his war against the French King. When the war was over, and the Duke became a king, the Waldenses took final and definitive possession of their valleys, and there have they ever since enjoyed the privilege of freely worshipping according to their own cherished traditions.

It is unfortunate that the Valdostans should have taken such an attitude toward some fellow-beings, who lived under the same rule, in the same natural surroundings, and showed an independence of thought, though somewhat differently applied, so similar to their own that it should have forcibly appealed to them. Why should one sturdy, proud, and faithful stock of mountaineers, try—even to arms and bloodshed—to keep another sturdy, proud, and faithful stock from attaining that liberty at home for which they themselves

had more than once stood boldly out, defending it in danger, and watchfully guarding it when everything seemed calm.

It is not expedient here to investigate this contradictory bit of mountaineer psychology, which is perhaps not too difficult to understand, if we remember that the peasants of the Alps are, in many ways, a naïvely primitive population. Whatever explanation we might give for it, one trait of the peasant mind stands out from this incident as clearly as anything can demonstrate it: intense conservatism. The Valdostans have had the same church ever since they were induced to abandon the practice of Paganism,—an action in which they were a long way behind the populations of the plains around them. What the name of that church is, matters little to them: it is *their* church. With its rites all their ancestors for centuries have worshipped, have been baptized, have married, have been laid at rest: the images of the crucified Christ that hang by the roadside, at wild and lonely turns, in dark forest shadows, in dangerous ravines, have been there for centuries, and their fathers and forefathers have for centuries taken off their hats and made the sign of the cross in passing; the chapels that offer shelter at exposed points, have protected shepherds and

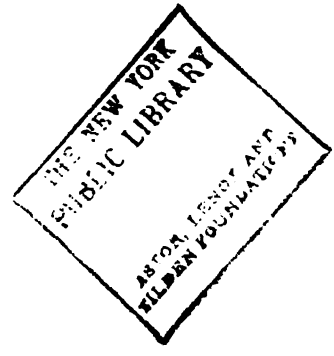
sheep of untold generations. The leaders of their church are from among them and are with them: there is a comfortable, matter-of-course understanding between leaders and led. Well or ill as their lives and the lives of their people in the past may have flowed, they are satisfied with them and see no need of change.

The storm of the Reformation, the savage clashes that followed its breaking out, ravaged in parts unknown: they did not touch the Valdostans. Standing, reverent, in the peaceful little churches, called together in hollow and on height by the bells pealing from the Lombard *campanili*, quaint and beautiful, they have listened to the wonted mass. Their churches, built upon rock, or upon Roman foundations, equally hard, cannot be shaken. The queer frescoes of eight or nine centuries gone, need not fear the hand of the feverish whitewasher, nor the wooden statues of the Madonna and the saints, the iconoclast: lean sinners, writhing in the flames of purgatory, and long-drawn martyrs, carrying their hearts without their breasts, may be inartistic, but the peasants like them.

Why should they change? When some one told them that strange people with a strange religion were coming to interfere with their spiritual

affairs and those of their leaders, they were ready to fight them back: and glad may one be for the fair valley of the Pennine Alps that the Waldenses changed their route, and that there no blood was shed in the name of the Prince of Peace.

Campanile of Sant' Orso, Aosta (about 1250 A.D.)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CHAPTER V

MEN AND MONUMENTS IN AOSTA

THE Middle Ages have not been so generous to Aosta in monuments as was the Roman era, for they were neither so rich nor so powerful: but, on the other hand, their efforts were concentrated within a much smaller field of activity, and have produced some very valuable things, even though the greater part of the city may have been poor and forlorn. Besides, what actually was done, having come into existence in a period much nearer and more like our own, has not been so badly abused by the crises of time.

We have already had occasion to mention the use of the towers that, at regular intervals, fortified the walls of the Roman city, by families arisen within the city itself, who transformed them into small fortresses and donjons, and, as best could be done, adapted them to the purpose of habitation. Better than the ordinary town houses they served to protect the inhabitants from attacks of maraud-

ers from all quarters of the compass; of such there was no lack in the centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire. It was here that many of the noble houses of the valley had their humble origin; and from here that in later times they moved out to different villages, built larger castles, and founded hereditary lines of feudatory lords, many lasting for centuries, some not yet extinct.

How great the demand for Roman monuments, wherein to feel secure behind strong walls, was in those times, when for lack of money the building of substantial edifices was a difficult matter, is shown by the fact that even the arch of Augustus was once used by somebody to ensconce himself; whereupon his family took the name of *de Arcu* or *d' Arche*.[1] His accommodation must have been perceptibly scanty if he had nothing but the arch to live in, with its thickness of hardly thirty feet and its width approximately the same, and no outstanding buildings into which to expand: unless we want to believe that in those days, as well as in our own modern apartment era, people—no matter how nobly named—were content to live in such reduced quarters as could equally well fit them as a last and lasting residence.

As for the towers, which afforded comfortable

[1] Promis, page 176.

quarters—three stories and the chance to expand sidewise along the walls—they were early pre-empted. The two towers of the Porta Prætoria, and the gate itself, were held by a family that in 1185 moved to Quart and built the castle, the transformed successor of which stands near that village. They were not yet counts of Quart when they resided in the city gate, but only *seigneurs* of the suburb of Sant' Orso. When they moved to their new abode, the city itself occupied the tower on the north and used it first for offices, and then as a Hall of Records and Archives, for all kinds of city documents, notary's papers, contracts, and the like: a fact that gave pretext for the sharp-wittedness of the popular tongue to set to work on a name for the tower, and it is one which still clings with the archives—though it was never officially noticed—the Tower of Insinuations! The tower on the south of the gate has half disappeared; the lower part, left, is incorporated in a private dwelling.

The tower immediately adjacent to that of the "Insinuations" on the north has disappeared altogether; probably, because the family that had laid hands upon it forgot that to grab a Roman tower is only the first step of a career in which there is no standing still, and "faster,

faster," must the grabbing be, just to keep up with where they were before! Or perhaps, knowing that lesson, they were not equal to the task. Their name would not bespeak the presence of men of action: *Casei*, they were called; that is, *Cheeses*,—and they left no mark.

The family next door made a more daring seizure to begin with: they located themselves in the north-eastern corner tower of the wall, and—not satisfied with having a corner apartment with a view in two directions, eastern sun, and all rooms on the street—they also occupied the amphitheatre. Since the amphitheatre had become known as the *Palatium Rotundum* (Round Palace), they were forthwith dubbed the *Seigneurs de Palatio*, or *du Palais*. When the time came, they sold out at a premium—large premium, considering that the original purchase had cost them nothing—to the count of Savoy. Thenceforth, the tower has, like the "Insinuations," had a standing always official, though of slightly varying character. The count installed his bailiff in it in 1265; the bailiff gave place to the court-house in 1537; and the court-house was succeeded in the nineteenth century by the county prison, which still has the privilege.

The towers on the north side are used as

private houses just now: one has harboured modest shops—after the owners had become barons of Gignod, on the route to the Grand St. Bernard. The north-western corner tower, a round, merloned building, stands with the name of Tour Neuve; but all the three following on the west side, toward the south, have gone, including the two that flanked the Porta Decumana.

The two towers of the Porta Decumana were occupied by the seigniors *de Friours*, who also rebuilt the tower to the south of the gate, between it and the south-western corner of the walls: but while there is no trace of the gate towers, the tower to the south still raises its square keep and its small merloned turret against the sky-line, facing, lonely, the glittering glaciers of the Ruitor, in modest and unpretending grey, its appearance hardly suggesting that so much romance and pathos are connected with it.

The Friours abandoned it long, long ago, and after them the ghosts took possession for other long, long centuries: they moaned pitifully within it, when the mountain storms howled outside, and they passed behind the paneless windows—dark as the eye-holes of a skull—like phosphorescent shadows, when the moon glimmered without. The people shuddered when they involuntarily

beheld such sights: shuddered so, that they even forgot to tear down the useless walls or to prey upon the roof-timber; and gave it the gloomy name of "Tour de la Frayeur,"—the Tower of Terrors,—evidently a free adaptation of the original name of Tour des Friours, suggested by frightened fancies.

At the end of the eighteenth century, a man of refinement by the name of Pietro Bernardo Guasco, a Ligurian living in Aosta, was stricken with leprosy. When the case became known, the town authorities hurriedly decided that the man must be isolated; but, not knowing exactly where to put him, they assigned the Tower of Terrors for his residence, or, as it might more appropriately be called, his living tomb. The unfortunate Guasco took his sentence as philosophically as its inevitability required, and in 1782 entered his prison, there to begin a lifetime of pain and sorrow.

Perhaps the Aostan authorities hoped that the ghosts, receiving this unwelcome addition to their household, might take revenge on the leper and drag him along with them into the region of darkness; or perhaps they expected that the man could not resist the horror of the haunted hold, and would be killed by fear. If they did, how-

ever, they were deluded: the ghosts, probably as afraid of the contact of the tainted limbs as were the Aostans themselves, fled from their abiding-place. The man, who had a living soul in a decaying body, did not die of terror: he lived, suffering long, as few men have ever had the force to do, even among the unhappy victims of ferocious political tyrannies.

He was kindly enough treated by his fellow-citizens; as kindly, at least, as fear allowed; his tower had three rooms and a little garden, with a wonderful outlook over glorious mountain scenery; the air was plenty and fresh around him; food and fuel were regularly brought to his threshold in generous quantity. The tower was not even locked; he could go out once in a while and take short walks toward the river, avoiding to be seen by passers-by. But what slow torture did his soul writhe under, every hour of the day, every day of the week, every week of the year! To feel his body go, fibre by fibre and cell by cell, as if some devilish power amused himself in picking it away with pinchers; to see his face alter and fall to pieces, leaving no human look to the flesh beset by sores; to know his life shut off from the company of men, hopelessly and forever, with no prospect to desire other than liberating death:

how many strong men could endure that slow, consuming fire?

An officer had the courage to visit the leper and shake hands with him, in 1797, fifteen years after his incarceration; and the leper, deeply moved by this unwonted touch of human sympathy, let the long pent-up stream of his thoughts run freely, while the hale young man indulgently listened. This interview, in which—it is more than likely—the author, who relates it impersonally, and the officer that took part in it, were the same person,[1] reveals so heart-rending a man's tragedy, that rarely has a subject of more intensity come into the hands of a writer; and its account is so graphic, and at the same time simple, that French literature has reserved for it a privileged place.

More than once the poor wretch felt an almost unconquerable impulse to break his head against the strong, rough walls of his prison, and end at a stroke the tempest of his feverish brain; many times he felt like running out, like approaching every happy, healthy human being he could meet, like forcing the contact of his unclean features on the pink cheeks of fair girls and little children, like disfiguring them, like dragging everybody

[1] De Maistre (Le Lepreux).

into his abyss of sorrow and torment. Yet every time the storm raged within him, his will gained the upper hand: the thought of God and of a great world slowly moving on its way, undisturbed by individual tragedies, of which there are so many, always steadied him in his path, and brought him back to the holiness of the divine decree: "His will be done." When the paroxysm was over, the little garden, his books, the beauty of sky and mountains, called him again to their quiet:—of his prison, he alone guarded the gates.

But his trials were not over with his own sufferings. One day,—eight years had already elapsed from the beginning of his martyrdom—another person was sent to his tower to share his enforced isolation: it was a fair young woman of twenty, whom also the loathsome disease had attacked. No charm did the lovely girl bring to the solitary leper, but more stinging pain, more crushing solitude: she was his sister. The malady had stricken her at the breast,[1] and left her face beautiful to behold; what was that to the brother but a new burning wound? She was fair, but he dared not

[1] The few details about the disease of the leper's sister, as well as its short duration, lead one to suppose that the case was improperly diagnosed as leprosy—it was probably a cancer.

meet her, because he was afraid the horrible sight of his face could frighten her; she was dear and loving, but he dared not touch her or kiss her, lest he might contaminate that part of her body which had been spared! He built a high hedge fence in the garden and behind it he concealed himself when she walked among the flowers: at times, he would steal a look at her from a hidden corner, and tremble lest she turn her head toward him. Still, the few words exchanged over the fence, the flowers brought by her to his room, her "Good-morning" and "Good-night" that opened and closed each day, must have been a comfort, even though a bitter comfort, to him.

His sister lived five years, and then departed: his lonely life began again, and lasted for eight years more—then he also passed on to a surely happier existence. That man had suffered untold and unspeakable pain; but through the slow loss of his body he had gained a beautiful soul, the serenity of which is pathetically yet nobly revealed by the words that he spoke in parting to the sympathetic officer: "*Étranger, lorsque le chagrin ou le découragement s'approcheront de vous, pensez au solitaire de la ville d'Aoste; vous ne lui aurez pas fait une visite inutile.*"—("Stranger, when grief or discouragement knock at your door, think of the

solitary one of the city of Aosta; you will not have visited him in vain.")

Now the Tower of Terrors is called by the Aostans the Tower of the Leper, and the story of its prisoner never fails to bring tears to the eyes of tender-hearted youths, when the older folk tell it of a winter evening from the half-light of the chimney-corner.

To complete the history and the round of all the towers of the city walls, we need only say that all the towers on the south side were monopolised and fortified by the house of Challant, which thus gave early proof of its intention and ability to do things in great style. Of the five towers, only two are in a condition to make their inspection worth while: the already mentioned *Tour du Pailleron*, near the station road, which has preserved its original Roman structure, and the *Tour de Bramafam*, a large, square keep with a round turret, occupying a place next to the south-western corner tower.

Bramafam, which holds in its foundations the ruins of a Roman gate, has its gloomy story, as pitiful as that of the Leper's Tower, but much more sinister, since crime and not self-conquest is at its core. It is said that a Challant, feeling

jealous of his wife—the story does not say whether with or without reason—locked her up in the miniature fortress and let her die of hunger. From that time, the tower that *braie fam*—cries, for hunger—has borne its strange name. We cannot say whether the story is true, or not: but it surely has nothing exceptional about it. During the middle ages, human life had only a very relative value, and even such distinguished folk as the Challants more than once committed murders, alike in fits of rage and in cold blood[1]: for this they were sentenced by their overlords to small fines or other light punishments.

Not long after towers and arch and amphitheatre of Roman time had been occupied by Aostan families of power, there was erected in Aosta the cathedral. We already said that, according to tradition, King Gontran rebuilt it in the sixth century: tradition declares also that it was originally built by the Emperor Constantine,

[1] Vaccarone (*Challants*), 4th Table.—Guglielmo of Challant (branch of Fénis and Ussel), baron of Ussel and St. Marcel, was sentenced (1411) to pay 500 florins for having killed a clown. Francesco of Challant, nephew of Guglielmo, having committed the much more heinous crime of ordering his brother killed—a man of the same rank—was deprived of his fee (1470).

on the site of a Roman basilica. The church does not now show many traces of its ancient origin, except in the crypt.

It was many times altered and restored—once in the fifteenth century by that Giorgio of Challant who built Issogne. The outside has been spoiled, from an artistic standpoint, by the heavy decorations so much in favor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the interior, instead, is simple and impressive: the shield of the Challants occupies more than one prominent place within. Some of the details of the church are of great interest: such as the carved choir-stalls of the fifteenth century; some mosaics, also of the fifteenth century; the cloister of 1460 with two statues of Challants. Below the choir in the dark crypt, which is apparently of Roman construction, there are two tombs: one is the family tomb of Challant, and the other for the bishops of the cathedral, who are there interred in anonymous humility.

Worthy of mention also is the treasury of the cathedral, containing the silver caskets with the relics of San Grato and San Giocondo: a silver bust of St. John the Baptist, enclosing a jaw of that forerunner of Christ—the jaw (of which we do not guarantee the origin), given by San Grato,

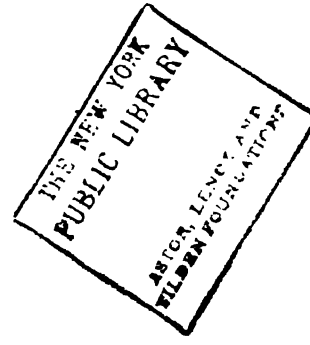
and the bust by Count Francesco of Challant in 1421; a Roman cameo with magnificent frame of gold filigree and precious stones, of the thirteenth century; various manuscripts and missals. A diptych in ivory requires special notice. It is a Roman work of the fifth century, a foot high by eleven inches wide, showing two figures of Emperor Honorius in bas-relief, in perfect condition. Said to have been presented by Gontran,[1] it is the most precious work of art of its kind and time in existence, though it lay till 1833 ignored in an old sacristy of the cathedral.

Incidentally, we may notice the collection of Canon Gal, in the Museum of the Academy of St. Anselmo. It contains relics, mostly Roman, excavated in various parts of the city and the valley: among them, as a rare curiosity, a Roman "steel" writing pen, which is, in reality, of bronze. The Romans did not content themselves with *stili* and quills, but used a most modern apparatus!

By the side of the cathedral ranks rightfully the church of St. Orso, which stands between the walls and the arch of Augustus. It is a complex of old buildings, including the church, the campanile, the priory, and the cloister. Though showing different

[1] Aubert, page 216.

The Cloister of Sant' Orso, Aosta (XIIth Century)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forms and periods of construction, the style is mainly Romanesque, or Lombard, of that type peculiar to Northern Italy characterised by the charm of light structure, harmonious proportions, and quaint ornaments. The campanile is of the thirteenth century; the cloister, with its capitals of curious animals and fanciful decorations, dates from the twelfth century, though later restored and altered; the priory, with its elegant terra-cotta windows, is of the fifteenth century, when Giorgio of Challant erected it. Sant' Orso is one of the most important monuments of Lombard art in Italy.

While we are in the Bourg St. Ours, we may point out a house (rue St. Anselme, 4) where, it is said, St. Anselm was born: whether that is really the house or not, it is a fact that St. Anselm was born in Aosta of the noble house Latour de Gressan, and now is properly regarded as one of the glories of the valley, by the side of the holy Grato and Giocondo.

Anselm, who first saw the light in 1033, entered the ecclesiastical career as a monk, and went a long way—both in his career and in his travels. After faithfully serving the Church in his valley and outside of it, he was sent abroad as archbishop, to Canterbury, England. A staunch supporter

of the papal authority, he had long conflicts with William Rufus and Henry I., and was not actually safe in his see until 1107. He died in 1109, and the Church yet honors him as one of its doctors. As such, Dante puts him in his *Paradiso* among the other doctors of the Church.[1]

Although Anselm is one of the great scholastic writers—is, in fact, called the "Father of Scholastics," his connection with Canterbury is so well known, that he has come down in history as Anselm of Canterbury, and is so probably better known than as the author of *Cur Deus Homo?* and other writings, wherein he expounds the fundamental principles of the dogmatic theories concerning predestination, and the all-sufficiency of Christ, and gives the dogmatic proofs of the existence of God and the Trinity.[2]

In the village of Gressan, about three miles west of Aosta, there are the ruins of a tower, enclosed by farmers' houses, called the "Tower of St. Anselme." It is all that is left of the castle of St. Anselm's family. Some artist, as deficient as unknown, frescoed on a wall inside of the tower a standing figure of the archbishop, in robes of state, wearing the mitre and carrying a double

[1] Dante, *Paradiso*, canto xii., verse 137.
[2] See for more details: Rigg, Church, Hasse.

cross in his hand, instead of the regular crosier. The painting has no date, but is doubtless an old work. An inscription beneath it reads as follows:

St. Anselme, Evèque de Canto-
Brie en Angleterre docteur de
L'Eglise pave devut[1] de la passion
De Jésus Christ et favory de Marie Protecteur
Du Duché d' Aoste—L' originaire de Gressan est mort
1109.

St. Anselm, bishop of Canter-
Bury in England, doctor of
The Church, perfect devotee of the Passion
Of Jesus Christ and favorite of Mary, Protector
Of the Duchy of Aosta—The original of Gressan
died 1109.

The traveller who leaves Aosta for the Grand St. Bernard, after passing for a short distance along the main street of the town, turns to the right and enters a narrow thoroughfare called the *rue Croix de Ville*, street of the Town Cross, which, passing the Gate of S. Stefano, will take him into the open country on the broad and excellent highroad to the distant pass. If he drives fast, or tries in thought to hurry away from the unattractive houses of the town into the charming fields beyond, he is likely to miss a small monument

[1] Aostan patois for *parfait dévot*.

that stands in the middle of the street—a low and slender column, supporting a cross.

That modest monument is worth more than a passing glance; for though little in size, it is great in significance. "The Town Cross," as it has come to be known, stands there to commemorate the failure of Calvin to introduce Protestantism into the valley, and through the valley, farther into Italy. This episode of Calvin's life is little familiar, and deserves some attention on our part.

It was in the year 1535: the valley was going through seriously troublesome times. Charles V. of Spain and Francis I. of France were about to break into their second war; the states of Savoy, under Charles III. the Good, had fared badly in the first war and were trembling before the impending peril of the second. At that juncture, Calvin appeared in Aosta.

He was a young man then, only twenty-six years of age, but he was already keenly active in his proselyting work. He had gone to the court of Ferrara, where Renée, a daughter of King Louis XII. of France, and wife of Duke Ercole d' Este, had offered him hospitality: but she was too liberally inclined in religious matters; Ercole objected; the Inquisition began to bestir itself, and Calvin thought best suddenly to leave the generous but

insecure home of Renée and retreat to Paris, whence he had come.

On the way back over the Grand St. Bernard, he halted in Aosta: he had some friends there; he was fiery and enthusiastic and he stopped to see what answer the mountaineers of the valley would give to his appeals for reformation. His propaganda did not last long: the population of the duchy, as we said, is and was steadily devoted to the Church, and did not lend sympathetic ear to his ardent oratory. Moreover, the reformer did something much worse: he tried to rouse the peasants to a political revolution; to incite them to undo their allegiance to the house of Savoy, to seize the opportunity of uncertain political conditions and make themselves a free and independent republic, and to join the Swiss Confederation as a sovereign canton, as Geneva and Valais did shortly afterwards. There is a strong presumption that Calvin had, by that time, more than a vague idea of experimenting with his theocratic government somewhere, and that Aosta seemed to be favourable ground for the trial. When, however, he began to talk of revolt and secession from the house of Savoy, to which the peasants were so faithfully attached, his activity began to smack of high treason, and things took a bad turn.

The assembly of the three estates was hurriedly summoned, under the chairmanship of Pierre Gazin, Bishop of Aosta, and with the subvention of the powerful Renato of Challant, Marechal of Savoy (by that time re-married after the death of Bianca Visconti, and already father of Filiberta and Isabella). The session was by no means stormy, because there was no difference of opinion on the point in question—what was to be done with this foreign subverter of the accustomed order of things: only one man made a speech of some length, Father Savioz of Aimaville, and that was against Calvin. The assembly voted without delay, and unanimously, that the valley should continue to share the fortunes of the Savoyan princes, and uphold the Roman Catholic Church; and that Calvin should be arrested.[1]

We might here add that, prolonging its session, the assembly on this occasion resolved upon the creation of the council of delegates, already spoken of. Partly because of this show of devotion, partly because of the loyalty displayed a few

[1] The details of this session are to be found in the minutes of the Assembly or "*Registres manuscrits du Conseil Général*," of the year 1534–1535, which used to be preserved in the archives of the city (Loche, Turin; page 247–248). The minutes have, however, disappeared from the archives—we are told.

years later, during the second war between Charles V. and Francis I., the Valdostans received new privileges from the dukes of Savoy—like the right of free circulation in Piedmont, and the place of honor for the council of delegates in all state ceremonies at the capital, in precedence of the Turin senate. The men who directed that eventful session of the assembly rose to great honors: Pierre Gazin was a member of the Council of Trent, and Father Savioz became General of the Minorite Friars in Milan.

The outlook for Calvin was extremely dark; for an imputation of high treason would inevitably bring with it the death penalty: but Calvin had no false pride and knew how to flee, when circumstances commanded. He did not wait to hear the final decision of the assembly, in the country house of Bibian, near Aosta, where he was the guest of a lawyer, Vaudan: as soon as his friends informed him that the meeting was taking a decidedly adverse turn, he left hurriedly, escorted by a few disciples; crossed the Buthier to Clauseline, and avoiding the highroad and pass of the St. Bernard, kept to the mule path on the left of the torrent; passed into the valley of Ollomont, and, over the dangerous Col de Fenêtre —much more perilous owing to the season, for it

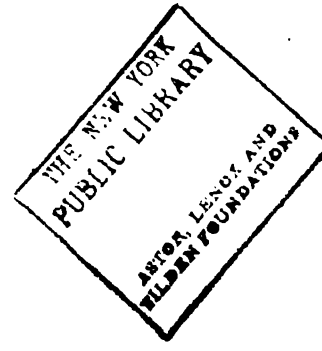
was the winter time of 1535–36—reached the Valais and safety.

When the soldiers charged with the apprehension of Calvin began to look for him, he was already securely out of reach. Calvin escaped with his life, but the joy of the mountaineers was great nevertheless. The condemnation of the reformer having been pronounced at eleven o'clock, from that time the custom prevailed throughout the diocese of Aosta of ringing the midday bells at eleven, in daily celebration of the event. The valley remembers it also in two other ways. There is a local wind that blows every day, as regular as a clock, rising at eleven o'clock and dying down at four in the afternoon: this wind was thenceforward called Calvin's wind, either because, like the wind, Calvin came and went, his stay short-lived; or because its beginning to blow at eleven o'clock somehow reminds the Valdostans of one who at that hour began himself a flight swift as the wind.

The Town Cross was erected five years later; and so persistent is the memory of the event in the valley that on the occasion of two centenaries the cross received further embellishment and attention, as proves the inscription to be found on the pedestal:

The Shield of the House of Challant (frescoed over fireplace in Baronial Hall, Manor-house of Issogne)

From a photograph by Frances Ferrero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Hanc Calvini Fuga	This (cross) Calvin's flight
Erexit	erected
Anno MDXLI	In the year MDXLI
Religionis Constantia	Religious constancy
Reparavit	repaired
Anno MDCCXLI	In the year MDCCXLI
Civium Pietas	Citizens' piety
Renovavit et Adornavit	renewed and adorned
Anno MDCCCXLI	In the year MDCCCXLI

Renato of Challant, in his turn, recorded the event with a polylinguistic tablet in the chapel of the Aimaville castle:

Renatus aetatis suae 42
Il chassa Calvin l'an 1535.

(Renato, in the forty-second year of his age: he chased out Calvin in 1535).

Thus did Val d' Aosta avoid that theocratic government which five years later was to obtain full sway in Geneva; and in which not all was peace and good-will to men, and surely not all was joy to the Eternal, in whose name it was administered.

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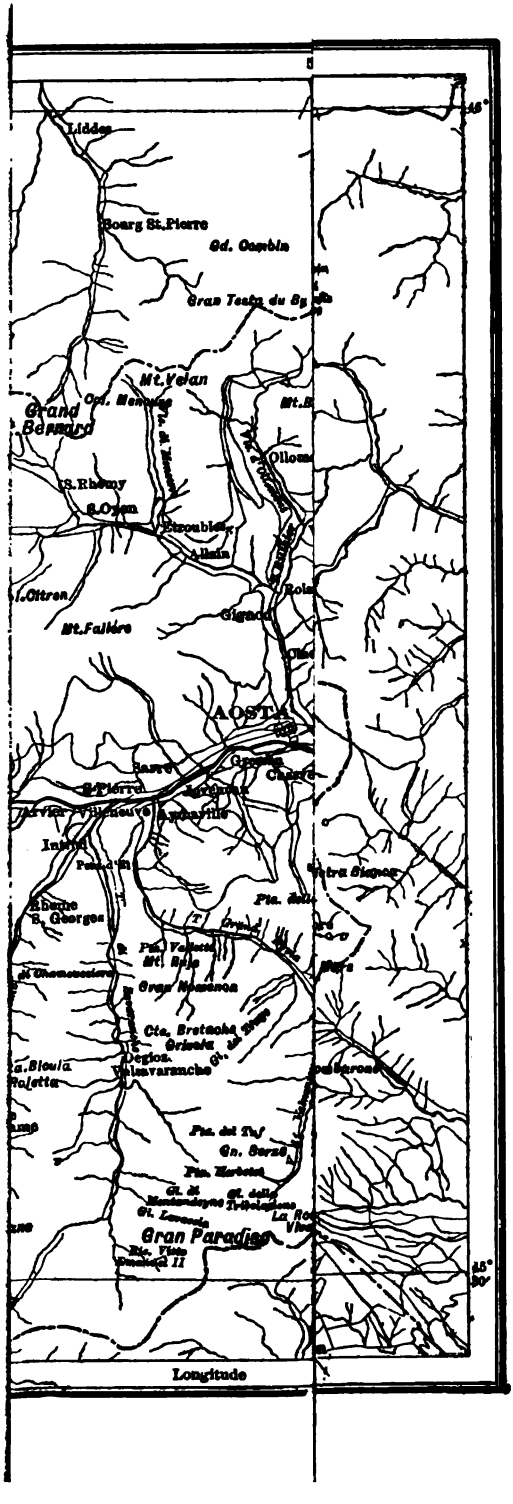
For times of trains and stages, and prices of tickets, the traveller should consult the latest Italian official *Orario*, which is published monthly by the management of the State railways and is for sale at every news-stand.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Mt.Fallère
Gignod
AOSTA
S.Pierre
Arvier
Villeneuve
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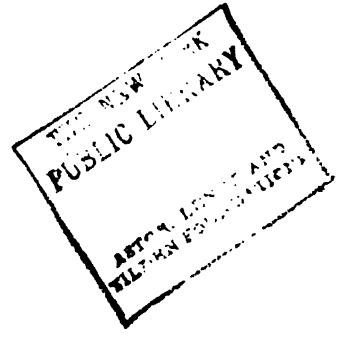
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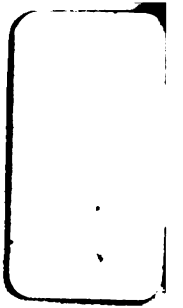
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